BRUNA'S REVENGE,

AND OTHER TALES.

VOL. I.

BRUNA'S REVENGE,

AND OTHER TALES.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"CASTE," "MY SON'S WIFE," "PEARL,"
&c. &c.

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CHAPTER I.

HOW THE GAUNTLET WAS THROWN.

THERE are two girls in the old-fashioned, many-windowed drawing-room of Beech-holmes Manor-house. One of these two—the fairer, Ann Travers, whose seriously sweet face, with the soft September light upon it, shines out pleasantly from the almost black, carved oak of the panelling behind her, as she sits in the deep, crimson-cushioned window-seat—believes herself to be alone; therefore, she is a little startled when a hand is laid on her shoulder—rather guiltily startled, it seems, for she flushes,

and hastily tries to hide the letter she has been reading.

"No use, Ann. Quite too late, my dear. Give me the letter. I am curious to read it."

"I thought you were in the garden, Bruna."

"So I was a short while since—the while since it has taken me to come here."

Bruna's hand was outstretched, but Ann retained her hold of the letter.

"Dear Bruna," she said, with gentle firmness, "don't ask me to do what I can't do. You know how I hate to refuse to do anything you ask, but I cannot give you this letter."

"Dear Ann," said Bruna, mocking Ann's tone, "don't make a fuss about a trifle. You know how I hate to ask a thing more than once; but I must read that letter."

"Indeed, Bruna, I cannot give it to you."

"Cannot! And why?" With an air of supreme surprise at so much resistance.

"Because I ought not."

"And why ought you not?"

"Because it was not meant for you to read, Bruna."

"Of that I shall be the better judge when I have read it."

"I am sure that harm would come of your reading it."

"The responsibility of that I take upon myself. Come, Ann, don't keep me waiting any longer. You know I hate to be kept waiting. I shall indeed feel that you are changing towards me if you refuse me so trumpery a request as the reading of a letter about which I happen to feel curious."

"You know, Bruna," Ann began. "Oh, Bruna!" was her exclamation; and tears came into her eyes as Bruna, by a swift and sudden movement, possessed herself of the coveted letter, which had been held in Ann's hand, half-hidden among the folds of Ann's dress.

"Forgive me my rudeness, Ann darling,"

spoke Bruna, coaxingly, kissing Ann as she spoke. "It was not unkind rudeness, dear, I meant to read the letter. It was kinder to take it from you by force than to torture it from you by persuasion."

"Indeed, Bruna, you must not read it."

"I am sorry, Miss Travers, to feel obliged to disobey your command."

"I beg you, Bruna, out of love for me, to give it back to me unread."

"I would indeed, Ann, now you ask so sweetly, if I believed it to be one bit less important to me to know its contents. Now, be quiet, there's a good child, and make no more fuss."

"It is no use, I know," said Ann, sadly; "but I am very grieved."

She turned from the window, and took up her work, lying on a little table near. Bruna sat down in the window-corner Ann had risen from, and began to read Ann's letter.

Bruna was quick to perceive a fact of

which Ann had no suspicion—that that letter was written for her, Bruna, to read: that in reading it she had fallen into a trap set for her.

A wicked light had kindled in the glorious dark eyes, which Ann sought wistfully when Bruna had finished the letter: so wicked a light that Ann shrank and inwardly shivered.

"I can't at all understand, Bruna," she said, apologetically, "why Helen Malcolm should write in that way to me. If it were not for the hand-writing, I could fancy it was not her letter."

"In spite of the hand-writing, Ann, it is not her letter. It is not a woman's letter. It is dictated by Helen's brother, Percy's friend. I am almost sorry I read it, Ann, because I know it was written on purpose for me to read."

"Oh, Bruna, that is most unlikely."

"Likely or unlikely, it was so written, sweet Sister Simplicity. Of this I am sure.

Of what effect it was intended to produce—whether Sir Baby's big friend wished to sting me into better or worse behaviour to Sir Baby—I am not so sure."

"I wish, Bruna, you would not call Percy that—'Sir Baby!' When you call Percy, your own lover, whom I suppose you love, that, I almost feel as if you deserved a little of what is said of you in that dreadful letter!"

This was spoken with what, for Ann, was unusual heat and asperity.

"You too, Ann!" exclaimed Bruna, reproachfully; and then she seemed to sink into sullenly sombre mediation. "My own lover, whom you suppose I love," she muttered. "I'm sure I don't know. It sometimes seems to me I love nothing and nobody—unless you, just a very little, Ann."

Rousing herself presently from this meditative mood, she said,

"Well, on the whole, I'm glad I read that vile letter. It has given me a useful

insight into things. I have felt lately as if some influence worked against me, now I know whence and what that influence is. On reflection, I can understand that it is not better but worse behaviour towards Percy into which Percy's big friend wishes to goad me. He would like that everything should end between us; no doubt he would also like that his fair sister Helen should one day be Mrs. Percival Travers."

"If only you didn't think so badly of everybody, dear Bruna."

"I don't consider I do think badly of everybody, Ann. I think most people are selfish and self-seeking, and try, with more or less ability, and with more or less success, in proportion to that ability, to get what they want. I think this of most people, and I don't consider that to think this is to think 'so badly' of them."

"Percy, at all events, is not selfish and self-seeking, Bruna."

"Ann is not," answered Bruna; "beyond that I will not go."

"Percy is not only not selfish and self-seeking," persisted Ann, "but he is most unselfish, always preferring others before himself."

"A proof, Ann."

"There is one very near and very ready, Bruna, if I liked to give it."

"Give it, dear."

"It is this, Bruna. Loving you as Percy loves you—and I don't know how a man could love a woman more or better—I am, nevertheless, sure that he would give you up, resign even the hope of seeing you again, though he would feel that life was not worth having without you, if he could be assured that, in some other way, you would be happier than as his wife."

"Which means," said Bruna, "in plain English, such plain English as is used by Percy's friend in that letter, that my evil and imperious humours have almost worn

out the patience even of my poor patient Percy!"

"I will keep silent, and not speak to you, if you so painfully and wilfully pervert what I say."

Bruna did not notice this speech of Ann's.

"Percy has always had a dear little loving pleader and defender in you, Ann," she went on; "but what you say is not true, dear. Percy knows there is a way in which I believe I should be happier than as his wife, and he is most passionately opposed to my taking that way."

"You believe, yes—at least, sometimes you think you do—but I said if he could be assured——"

"Surely I must be the better judge for my own happiness."

"Percy says not, dear, because you are so utterly without any experience, that yours would be an ignorant judgment—a leap in the dark."

"How well we quote Percy!"

At that Ann blushed, and drooped her head a little lower over her work. For a little while there was silence. Then Ann said,

"One word, in justice to Percy, I must speak, Bruna. If you think that any complaint of you, written or spoken, by Percy, can have provoked this painful and unjustifiable letter, why, then, Bruna, you do Percy so monstrous an injustice that——"

Ann was never very ready of speech, and now she came to a pause for want of any eloquent enough words with which to finish that sentence.

Quick and heedless came Bruna's comment—

"I'm sure, Ann, any impartial person would judge that it was you, not I, who loved Percy, and whom Percy should love." She added, more slowly—"It is strange, I often think, that it is not you he loves. I suppose he is fool enough to be dazzled by

my splendid beauty," she ended scornfully.

Bruna saw, without just then much noticing, the sudden and painful suffusion of Ann's fair face. Ann's tone betrayed irritation as she remarked,

"It is unusual—it is strange, Bruna, and it always seems to me unpleasant, that you should speak of your beauty in the way you do, as much as you do."

"Do I speak of it much, Ann? You may, nevertheless, depend upon it I think of it less, and value it less, than any other girl would do."

"Indeed I believe that, dear."

Ann's irritation had already passed. Unseen by the self-absorbed Bruna, a tear fell upon Ann's work: it was a tear of penitence. Ann's work was "charity-work." At one time Bruna had almost ridiculed Ann into being ashamed of this occupation; since which time, having become ashamed of that half-shame, she had devoted herself to it the more assiduously. "Being so

rich," she said—"I mean so rich in proportion to my wants—it is nothing to give the poor people only money. If I work for them, that feels like doing something for them. And I am not clever, as you are, Bruna, and so able to spend my time to more advantage."

Bruna now set herself to re-read that letter slowly, dwelling on each obnoxious passage. When she had done this, she refused to burn it, or to return it to Ann, but put it into her pocket.

"I wish to possess it," she said, "to be able to refresh myself by an occasional perusal of it."

As she said this, there was a brighter glow than often burnt there on her clear cheek, and an exultant light in her eyes. Already she was foretasting the sweetness of revenge, though exactly how this revenge was to be wrought out she had hardly yet begun to imagine.

"Well!" she ejaculated, her slight light

foot tapping the floor, "say what you like, Ann, but how, except through Percy, can Percy's friend have received the image of me upon his mind, which he so flatteringly reflects in this letter? More odious than odious Beatrice at her most odious! A more untamed shrew than even untamed Katherine! Well!—Is it Sir Baby or Sir Baby's friend will tame me, I wonder? Well——"

Each "well" was more dangerous sounding than the preceding one.

Just at this moment both the girls became aware of an approaching step. Bruna (Miss D'Almeida) caught up a book, and assumed to be lost in its pages. Ann pursued her occupation, while over her face dawned a soft, slow, sweet, involuntary smile.

CHAPTER II.

PUT IN TRAIN.

THE young man who now, opening the door, looked in, was Percival Travers —the Percy of the conversation between the two girls. To Ann he was first cousin; to Bruna some sort of almost incalculably distant connection.

To Ann it always seemed as if, when her cousin entered the room where she was, there came with him "the sunshine and the sweet smell of the fields." Of her cousin she had thought when she read those words written of Sir Pelleas. Of her cousin she had thought when she read of Sir Lancelot's young son, Galahad—how he was

"seemly and demure as a dove, and of all manner of good feature." Of her cousin she had thought when she read Chaucer's description of "the youngé Squire."

"He was as fresh as is the month of May.
. . . .
Well could he sit on horse, and fairé ride:
He couldé songés make and well indite,
Just, and eke dance, and well pourtray and write:
So hot he lovéd, that by nightertale
He slept no more than doth the nightingale.
Courteous he was—lowly and serviceable,
And carv'd before his father at the table."

Ann was quick to see that Percy's face had not its usual sunshiny joyousness.

"Have you yet decided if you will ride this afternoon, Bruna?" was his question.

"I'm sure I don't know," she answered carelessly, not looking up, but turning a page of her book as she spoke. "I haven't thought about it since the last time you asked."

"Dear Bruna, this is the third time Percy has asked us," interposed Ann.

"He gives himself and us a great deal too much trouble,"—roughly spoken.

Mr Travers took out his watch.

"It is just four o'clock. If we go, we ought to start by five, or we shall be late for dinner. As we were late yesterday, it's not worth while to try my father's temper in that way again to-day—there being no good reason to do so."

"Do you mean there was no good reason yesterday? That the afternoon was too hot for me to wish to start earlier, and the evening too pleasant for me to wish to return sooner, were, I imagined, sufficient and sufficiently good reasons." For the first time Bruna looked up into her lover's face, as she asked, "Did you not find them so?"

"I was not speaking of yesterday. This afternoon is not over-warm."

"But *I* was speaking of yesterday. Did you not yesterday think those reasons sufficient and good?"

"I did. Whether you should have done so is another matter."

"Quite," she answered; "and one with which you have no concern."

"To that I can hardly agree."

"I must tell you, Percy," interposed Ann, "that Bruna said, just after lunch, that if we rode to-day we would start in good time, so as not to annoy uncle by being late on two following days."

"Bruna is always better in deed than in word," commented Mr. Travers. "She takes a strange pleasure in trying to seem less kind and amiable than she is."

"Mr. Travers may one day have to change that comforting doctrine—may find Bruna's deeds infinitely worse than any of her words."

Having said which in a tone of menace, the perverse girl resumed her reading—or rather her pretence of reading. As Mr. Travers studied her down-drooped, half-averted face, his own expressed pained patience. Then, involuntarily, he looked to Ann with question and appeal. His face

asked plainly, "What does this mean? What has happened to annoy her?"

"I think, Percy, you had better waste no more time upon us, but take for granted that we shall not ride to-day," Ann answered.

Bruna immediately said, "I should particularly like to ride to-day, if there were any horses fit for us."

It is difficult to know whether Ann or Percy looked the more surprised by this answer, given out of the very "superfluity of naughtiness!" There was restrained indignation in the tone in which Mr. Travers said,

"May I inquire what fault you find to-day with the mare you praised yesterday?"

"To-day is to-day—yesterday was yesterday!"

"And what is her fault to-day?"

"She is too much like me; she has wicked eyes; she is bad-tempered; she is not trustworthy."

"Do you consider yourself a better judge

in such a matter than I am, Bruna? Or do you think I would let you ride anything of the trustworthiness of which I was not well convinced?"

"Men are always so bigoted about their horses—very young men especially. A favourite is always faultless."

"If I know myself, I don't believe any prepossession in favour of an animal could make me careless in mounting a lady."

If he had said, "in mounting you," she might have been softened, as it was she answered, with careless rudeness,

"I don't suppose you do know yourself."

Mr. Travers, twisting the ends of his fair moustache, kept silent a few moments; then he said,

"It's in the nature of things that a man should weary of always fruitless labour. If matters go on as they have done lately, I shall weary of trying to please even you, Bruna."

"Is that a threat, Mr. Travers?" Her

head was lifted, and her eyes flashed. She seemed not only ready but glad to find cause for anger.

To poor Ann all this was exquisitely painful; but not for this reason, but because she fancied that Bruna always behaved worse to her lover when a third person was present (believing this because it was incredible to her that Percy should never receive better treatment than she saw meted to him), she prepared quietly to slip away. But Bruna detected her intention, and said,

"Wait for me, Ann. If we are going to ride, we may as well go and dress."

"I understood, Bruna, that you considered I had no horse fit for your riding. What do you propose to ride, if not your own?"

"Ann's; and Ann shall ride mine."

Mr. Travers smiled.

"A comment I quite understand on the seriousness of what you said as to your mare's untrustworthiness. I am not the least afraid to see Ann mount her, though

Ann is not half the horsewoman you are."

"An accident to Ann, the heiress, would be much less important than an accident to Bruna, the beggar. 'My face is my fortune, sir, she said.'"

"As much as possible to pain me in as few words! If that was your object, you succeeded admirably. You speak as if——"

"As if," she haughtily interrupted, "my fortune were still to seek, instead of having been secured when your highness condescended to fancy my face. But then it is my face, my splendid face, you fancy, and were that spoiled, I could not be so mean as to hold you to your bargain. Come, Ann, we'll go together. No private and confidential discussion as to what has so roughed me up between you two, if you please. I know well enough that it is only when dazzled by my splendid face that people (Ann excepted always) say any good of me. When that does not shine upon them, I am painted black enough."

She led Ann away with her, a rather reluctant captive. Ann would have liked to say a few consolatory and explanatory words to her cousin.

Half an hour afterwards they were starting for their ride.

"You are not afraid, dear?" asked Percy, mounting Ann on Bruna's beautiful mare.

"No, indeed; and that is no proof of great courage. Afraid to ride a creature you have trained for Bruna!"

"But you are not the horsewoman Bruna is. You don't ride, you only sit upon your horse—that not too safely, though prettily enough. As to your reins, you're uncommonly awkward with them, Ann."

"Nevertheless," said Bruna, "Ann is safer on Stella than I should be to-day. I'm in the mood to make the quietest creature vicious."

So saying, she gave Ann's pony, on which she was now mounted (a timid creature, only used to the tenderest treatment,) a

sharp touch of the whip and snatch at the curb, thereby causing it to bound from the ground, and then to rear in pure alarm. In an instant Percy was at its head.

"I told you so," said Bruna, coolly.

"You had better not ride to-day, if you are unable to control yourself."

"Did I want to ride to-day? You worried me into it." Then, seeing Ann's white face, with sudden sweetness, "I beg your pardon, Ann, darling, I'll not do it again. I should be sorry to teach your pet bad habits."

"You had better leave your whip at home, Bruna. It isn't safe in your hands when you use it according to your own caprices of temper, not according to the requirements of your horse."

"I don't choose to have my temper abused, Mr. Travers. Because I myself speak evil of it, is no reason for my allowing other people to do so."

"Other people!" echoed Percy. "Am I

no nearer and dearer than just to be classed with 'other people?'"

She laughed.

"What a delightful ride we seem likely to have to-day! I pity poor little Ann. Percy, for Ann's sake shall we try and be pleasant with each other? Percy, don't you think I'm one of the sort of women who ought never to marry unless they wish, or, at least, are prepared, to die a violent death? Have not I a temper and a tongue that might goad any man in time to the state of intolerable exasperation in which he would be ready to murder me for the sake of peace and quiet?"

"He might, on the other hand, get used to temper and tongue, and 'rather like them' as being yours," was answered, with a melancholy smile.

"And how he'd enjoy life in the process! My poor Percy, you could not do it. You'd not kill the shrew, but the shrew would kill you. That is to say, you would die

of the slow agony of 'getting used to it.'"

For a moment Bruna's face was gravely tender, and the rich depths of her dark eyes were moist and pitiful. She was often sorry for Percy, but she was always more sorry for herself.

They were now in one of the smooth-turfed "rides" in the park, a wide straight glade between grand old beeches. Bruna giving the sign, they set off at a canter, that became a gallop before they drew rein.

"I'm better now," said Bruna. "Do you know what I think would do me more good than anything else? To see you and Ann in a 'wicked rage,' abusing me, each other, and everybody. To live with two people so nearly angelic is almost enough, without other things, to make a devil of a woman of my sort. I often use you badly, Percy, because I am mad with myself for being what I am; and then I use you worse, because I'm still madder with myself for using you badly. But now enough of the

confessional. I want to ask you to do something, or rather to give you my permission that you should do it; for it is what you must yourself want to do. It seems, by a letter Ann had from Helen Malcolm to-day, that your friend Malcolm Malcolm is in London just now. I've always been curious to see and to know him. I wish you would ask him to Beech-holmes for a few weeks. I want change and amusement, and I'm sure he would amuse me."

No answer from Percy. Bruna glanced sidelong at the knit brow and grave face.

"You look as if I had asked something monstrous. I expected you would be pleased that I should wish to see and to know your friend."

"Malcolm is going abroad very shortly. I don't suppose he could spare time to come down here."

"Your answer is an evasion. At least you can ask him to come."

"To be candid, Bruna, I would rather

he did not come. There is, just now, so much in our daily life that I should naturally shrink from exposing to outside criticism—especially to the criticism of one predisposed to form a hostile judgment of anything or anybody considered by him to be detrimental to my happiness. You do yourself always so much injustice, that—" he hesitated.

"I understand," said Bruna. "But you leave one thing out of sight. May not your friend's prepossessions be all in my favour, when his eyes are dazzled by my beauty, more especially if I smile graciously upon him?"

Mr. Travers coloured girlishly at this suggestion; his proneness to do so was one of his offences in Bruna's eyes; but there was nothing girlish in his frown. His tone was cold and displeased as he answered—

"I don't think even your gracious smiles would dazzle Malcolm. He is singularly unimpressionable. There is only one woman

in whose worth he believes—his sister; for her he has a good-comrade sort of affection, and he often expresses regret that she is not a man."

"Had the savage no mother?"

"One who was, in great part, cause of his low estimate of women."

"He ought to be tamed. Ann should undertake the office."

There was a short silence, then Bruna questioned—

"What is Mr. Malcolm like to look at? I know he is big, but is he fair or dark, handsome or ugly?"

"As he is red-headed and red-bearded, I suppose he would be called fair; but he is so weather-beaten it is hard to know what to call him."

"Well, you haven't answered my third question—handsome or ugly?"

"That is a matter of taste. He is a grand-looking fellow, according to my notions."

"A red-headed Celt, according to the old saying, is pretty sure, sooner or later, to be red-handed also."

"I have not yet heard of Malcolm as a slayer of men. 'A mighty hunter,' and, therefore, a slayer of beasts, I know him to be. The excursion on which he is now starting is a lion-hunting expedition in Africa."

"A lion-hunting expedition in Africa! I like the thought of that!" exclaimed Bruna, with great animation. "About that there must surely be some novelty and excitement."

She led Percy on to talk at some length of his friend; she seemed interested, and she did not always do him the honour to appear interested when he talked.

"If I promise to be on my good behaviour while he is here, will you invite Mr. Malcolm to come?" she asked, after a pause, and when he thought the subject done with.

"What is that promise worth, Bruna? I take for granted you always treat me no worse than you can help."

"If I were amused, I should be able to be more amiable; and I think Mr. Malcolm would amuse me."

"You are very far from understanding the sort of man he is, if you think so. He is far more likely to make you very angry, and to make me very angry with him for making you so. Probably I should have to pay the price of losing my friend as the cost of your amusement."

"You are very far from understanding the sort of woman I am, if you think it would be so. It is not the things that ought to anger me that ever do. Nor is it the things that ought to be difficult to me to bear that are so. For instance, the things that are often most intolerable to me in my life are good and beautiful things. The monotony of goodness about you and Ann, the monotony of beauty about Beech-

holmes, sometimes seem to me death and destruction. You think my words strong, but my feelings are far stronger. The hate with which I hate your father (and which he is good enough cordially to return) is about the healthiest thing in my life. All the rest is stagnation."

On Percy's part pained silence.

"I shall say no more about it, but I know you will invite Mr. Malcolm. Now, if Ann is not tired, let us ride home fast."

They rode home fast.

When they were close to the house, Bruna broke into Percy's not over-cheerfully speculative ponderings with the sudden question—

"Is he rich or poor?"

"If you mean Malcolm, he is poor."

"Of course I mean Malcolm. Of whom but Malcolm could I be thinking?"

CHAPTER III.

FAMILY LIFE AT BEECH-HOLMES.

"BEING a woman, how I hate to be poor!" was Bruna's exclamation, as she prepared to dress for dinner. "If I were a man I shouldn't mind it, for I would soon mend it."

"But, Bruna," pleaded Ann, pausing on her way to her own room, "you know you have only to ask—not even to ask, but just let yourself be given."

"That is not it! However, it's no use talking. And, possibly, if I had what I fancy I want, I should be no better off. The fault is in me, or in life itself, which, as far as I have yet known it, has always seem-

ed to me like being cooped up in so small a cage, that one could not stir without knocking oneself against the bars."

Ann sighed as she passed on. When Bruna talked in this strain a little indignation would mingle with Ann's gentle sorrow. That the girl who might, whenever she chose, be Percy's wife, should feel the deep-seated discontent that always shone through Bruna's talk, was to Ann as incomprehensible as it was sad.

Talking to Ann and talking to herself being much the same to Bruna, having loosened a "night of hair" from the compact knot in which she had worn it under her hat, leaning one elbow on her dressing-table and looking into her own face in the glass, she went on—

"Even if I were a man what would there be worth caring for? It is all so stale, flat, unprofitable! It has all been before, over and over again. It will all be in the future over and over again. I know well enough

what it is I want—something to do that, as I do it, seems to me worth doing. But, being a woman, what is there? And, even were I a man, what would there be? Before I've tried anything, I feel sick of everything. Of course the fault is in me. How strange it all is!" She went on after a pause—"I almost think that those whose life is a mere struggle to keep alive have the best of it. They come into the world bringing their unmistakeable work, from which, while they remain in it, there is no escape, with them, in their bodies, which they must labour to feed and to clothe. And yet one might as well envy the beasts of the field, or decide that ''twere better not to be' as envy those poor wretches. How strange it all is! And how I should like to feel really alive, and really to value life! To feel alive and value life as a soldier must while he fights death. While the battle rages it must be glorious to be a soldier! But before and after—— I wonder if lion-hunting is very

exciting. At all events, at moments it must be."

Then, as she began to arrange her scattered locks, she thought of Malcolm Malcolm, "the red-headed Celt," her enemy. Thinking of him, and looking at her own beauty, she smiled. Accustomed to find Percy obedient to her lightest wish, she had no doubt that, after what had passed, Mr. Malcolm would be invited to Beechholmes. The mere prospect of collision and contest was "good" to her; it stirred her blood and quickened her pulses. Even had she admitted the possibility of being worsted, she would still have preferred to fight.

"Are you ready, Bruna?" asked Ann, presently; adding, "Why, what have you been doing to yourself, dear? You are looking more brilliant than I have seen you for ever so long."

"In this shabby black gown?"

"It never seems to me to matter much

what you wear, Bruna. It is what is going on within you, not what you put on outside, that makes you look more or less beautiful."

"But, nevertheless, I believe, Ann, that the effect of my beauty might be heightened by dress. I mean to try. And so, this evening, I mean to ask the old ogre for money."

"I do wish, darling Bruna, that, for Percy's sake——"

"I know all you are going to say, Ann. I have told you again and again I will not have your money or Percy's. I prefer to wring money from my uncle's hatred, rather than to accept it from Percy's love, or even yours."

"I cannot understand that, Bruna."

"I'm sure you cannot. I didn't expect you would."

"Uncle has treated you better lately, has he not, Bruna?"

"He hates me more civilly, Ann, but

more dangerously, ever since Percy told him he meant to make me his wife, as soon as I would let him. Percy behaved in a most plucky way that day, Ann. I was proud of him!"

"Percy has plenty of quiet courage, Bruna."

"Has he? It is so quiet, then, that it gives no sign."

"You should not say that, Bruna. You know it always shews itself when there is real occasion for it."

"I only said it to plague you, Ann," Bruna answered, kissing her; and then they went to the drawing-room together.

Ann was prettily dressed in white, with a white rose in her hair. Bruna's black gown was unrelieved by any ornament. Her hair, of which she had great wealth, was arranged with as wild a picturesqueness as could be tolerated in a modern drawing-room, before wild picturesqueness had become the order of the day. The two were

of the same height, and not very different in proportion; they could wear each other's dresses, gloves, and shoes. Bruna was the thinner, the more fragile in make, and yet she looked the stronger, tougher, and more wiry. Ann, always fair, fresh, and "neat," looked purely healthy, in mind and body, but not very strong in either. Ann's habitual expression was of soft-shining, serene content; Bruna's of a superb sort of discontent and self-contempt, which often clouded and marred the lines of a beauty that, had she been "good" and happy, might have been perfect. Bruna's movements, though never ungraceful, often had a startling, and, to nervous people, uncomfortable abruptness and unexpectedness; and she often looked as if febrile and self-consuming excitement burnt in her over-brightness. About Ann, though possibly she might be considered a trifle "conventional," there was always an atmosphere of harmony and repose, a something gracious, soothing, refreshing.

Both Ann and Bruna called Mr. Travers "uncle," as they both called Percy cousin. They were both orphans, and to both, through a curious unfitness of things, Mr. Travers stood in the position of guardian.

Ann, the heiress, had been destined by the old man to become his son's wife; Bruna, the gipsy beggar, as formerly he had been fond of calling her, to be his son's wife's humble companion. But the parts did not fit.

Mr. Travers—he was a ferocious-looking man, of about seventy, the most remarkable thing in whose appearance was the strong contrast between the redness of his nose and the whiteness of his bushy moustache and eyebrows, and of his hair—was pacing up and down the room, watch in hand, when the girls entered it.

"Horrid old hypocrite!" was Bruna's inward salutation to him as, with a great show of deferential courtesy, he advanced to meet them, bowing low over Miss D'Almeida's

hand, then touching Ann's cheek with his moustache. He was fond of Ann, if of anything or anybody.

"You cannot complain of any want of punctuality on our part to-day, sir," Bruna remarked.

"I hope Miss D'Almeida does not mean to imply that I am in the habit of complaining of anything so amiable and distinguished a young lady may do, or leave undone."

Bruna delicately, but quite perceptibly, shrugged her beautiful shoulders, and the old man went on—

"But since you claim merit for strict punctuality, I may take the liberty to mention that, whereas half-past seven is our dinner-hour, it now wants only one quarter to eight."

"Your watch is too fast, sir."

"My watch, Miss D'Almeida, is never too fast or too slow."

"A miracle indeed among watches."

"It is a good watch; but its great exact-

ness is due to the extreme care with which it is regulated. Allow me."

The servant having now announced the dinner, the old man offered his arm to his future daughter-in-law. Percy, following with Ann, found time for a few words about Bruna.

"I don't think she can be well, Ann. She often looks too splendidly brilliant. I expect great part of what she considers ill-temper is, in reality, ill-health."

"I think she requires more change and variety in her life, Percy. I am sure she tries to interest herself in the small matters that occupy me; but she can't. It isn't won't, but really can't. After she is married—" a delicate blush rose to Ann's cheek—"you will be able to make her life different."

"Please God," said Percy, fervently. "But when will that be? At present she won't have the subject of time approached."

"You may think how I shall miss her,"

continued Ann. "I don't venture to think of what my life will be when she is gone; but yet I long for the time to come. She seems so restless and unsettled, and—"

They were now in the dining-room, and Bruna's eyes upon them; and those eyes noted that Ann's were moist, and that Percy looked earnest and troubled.

"What are you two conspiring about?" she asked; but added immediately, "I don't want to know. I am content to leave my interests in Ann's hands."

When they were seated at the round table (a little island of light in the large dark room), the usual fuss began—Mr. Travers, finding everything wrong, requiring that everything should be re-arranged.

"It is very strange, after all these years, that you shouldn't have got into my ways, Hughes, so little as I ask of you. But here, you have placed the lights just where they hurt my eyes; you have put the screen just where it keeps off no draught. I think

you might learn to study the way of the wind once a day, and then, unless you're a greater ass than I think you, you'd not protect the north-east side of my chair when the wind blows from the south-west. A most dangerous wind is the south-west. It is in the possibility of things, Miss D'Almeida, that you may live to be old and rheumatic, in spite of the scorn that now curls your beautiful lip at the precautions necessary for the safety of one who is already so."

"What wind do you prefer, Mr. Travers, if you consider the south-west wind to be 'most dangerous?' I have always thought the south-west wind the only safe and pleasant wind. Do you prefer the north-east?"

"Much might be said in favour of such a preference, Miss d'Almeida. As much as might be said in favonr of preferring an open and declared enemy to a treacherous friend. Hughes, you can tell the cook that this soup is simply abominable."

After that every dish placed on his table

was found fault with more or less ferociously. Having shown that he had noticed the contemptuous expression on Bruna's face, Mr. Travers chose to exaggerate that which had provoked it. At last Bruna said,

"I wonder, sir, you should retain in your service a person so flagrantly inefficient that she doesn't send up a single dish of which you can eat without disgust. Surely you are in danger of starvation. To-day, for instance, what have you been able to take? A little soup, a little fish, a few slices of mutton, a little game, some trifling matters of jelly and cream. How can the strength of an invalid be supported in this manner?"

"If I began to reform my son's establishment, Miss d'Almeida, the cook is not the only person of which I should rid it." Then meeting his son's eyes he added—"Surely no gentleman was ever so ill-served by his butler. Hughes, this claret is corked."

When the girls had left the room, which

they did at the first opportunity, there was a little pleasant chat between father and son.

Drawing his lip up so as to show some very ugly teeth, a trick that gave a wolfish expression to his face, Mr. Travers said,

"If you marry that girl, she'll drive you to the devil before six months. Or, if she doesn't, the reason will be that she goes there herself, and the last company she'll desire will be her husband's."

"If you wish me to remain in the room, choose some other subject for conversation, father. I have before requested that Miss D'Almeida may not be spoken of between us."

"Dependent as I am for my place in this house on your bounty, boy, I yet can hardly submit to be dictated to as to the subjects on which I may or may not speak."

"You know, sir, this is the only subject to which I ever make objection, however distasteful to me are many others you select.

You have done Bruna irreparable wrong by your harsh and unjust treatment of her. You have revenged yourself on her for an injury done you before she was born. Even now you treat her with covert insult, insufferable cynicism."

"And how does she treat me? You have no sensitiveness for the feelings of your old father. You would have me let the saucy gipsy sneer in my face, and not slap her brazen cheek. What is the 'irreparable wrong' I have done her? Was it done when I opened my doors to the little beggar who otherwise must have starved, and who, since she entered them, has wanted for nothing?"

"'Wanted for nothing,'" Percy echoed with sad-toned irony. "She has wanted for everything most vital to a girl of that nature; but for Ann she would have perished of her want. I am not sure but that, as far as my poor Bruna is concerned, it would have been better for her to have perished

at your closed door than to have been kept alive on the bitter bread doled out to her by your dislike."

"Dislike!" snarled out the old man. "I don't dislike her, boy! I leave such maudlin sentiments to my milksop son. I don't 'dislike'" (speaking the word with a grimace), "I *hate*. And I hate this girl!" bringing his sinewy old hand into violent contact with the table. "I never was a namby-pamby fellow of 'likes' and 'dislikes.' I loved her mother, and I hated her father with the strong passion of a strong man. The girl is all her father's, and I hate the girl. And, boy, I can tell you, your love agrees with her no better than my hate—no better than her father's love did with her mother. She's a savage. You're no mate for her. I understand her better than you do. If you'd not come between us, by now I'd have had her in good training."

"It is fast coming to this," said Percy, rising, "that I shall be obliged to avoid

meeting you, since I cannot do so without risk of hearing the woman I love spoken of with outrageous insult."

Percy left the room before Mr. Travers could speak again. His reflection was this—"I must look out. It won't do to drive the boy too far. Won't do to forget that the house is his, not mine—curse it!"

Before she went to bed that night—choosing a time when Percival was not present, that she might not pain him—Miss D'Almeida said to Mr. Travers,

"Sir, I want some money." She had a lighted candle in her hand, and was just about to follow Ann, who had already gone upstairs.

"Miss D'Almeida has only to intimate her wants to have them gratified," he said, bowing low. Then he turned away, meaning her to understand that so the matter ended for that time. But this did not suit Bruna. She did not choose to have to repeat her demand, which was what she knew, by ex-

perience, Mr. Travers would make her do again and again, pretending to forget its having been made.

"I wish this want satisfied at once—to-night, if you please, Mr. Travers. I intend to go to town early to-morrow, to make some purchases. My wardrobe needs re-furnishing—my dresses are too shabby for a lady to wear."

"For a lady of your birth, fortune, and position, you mean?"

"Exactly," she answered, so gravely as to make him doubt if she had understood his sneer.

"If you will take the trouble to follow me to my study, I will have the pleasure of writing you a cheque."

He led the way—she followed.

"Will you not be seated?" he asked, as he seated himself at his writing-table.

"Thanks—I prefer to stand."

"The amount?" he presently questioned, glancing up.

Miss D'Almeida paused a moment, and repeated his question reflectively.

"The amount?" She had not made up her mind how heavy the demand should be.

"From how much I could save my son if I had the power of making a beggar of him!" Mr. Travers said, as if to himself, while he held his pen suspended, ready to fill in the figures she should name. "Miss D'Almeida would not marry a beggar."

"As far as I can judge, she would not marry your son if he were a beggar," she answered.

"I'll tell the fool that!"

"He has heard it often enough from me."

"Has he ever told you that he would not marry you if you were not a beggar? Eh, has he ever told you that? That he would not marry you if you were not a beggar?"

"No," said Bruna, slowly, "he has not told me that. I know him well enough, however, to know whether or not it is true."

"She believes it! That blow went

home!" the old man thought, with an inward chuckle.

"I am waiting your commands," he reminded her.

"I don't think less than five hundred pounds will be of much use to me," was answered promptly, and yet deliberately.

"Five hundred pounds! Did I hear you rightly?"

"Quite so!"

"Some day I hope to repay him every farthing," was Bruna's thought.

"I'll make Percy pay for this pretty well," was the old man's. Then he turned a queer colour, as the idea occurred, "She is going to buy her trousseau. She means to be married soon!"

He filled in the cheque and gave it to her. She took it with a pre-occupied air. Then, seeing him about to close the book,

"By-the-by," she said, "Ann also wants money."

"Dear little Ann! I'll write her a cheque

with pleasure; but only for a tenth part of your magnificent demand. Ann must not be allowed to squander her substance on churches, schools, and charities."

Bruna deigned the one word, "Thanks," and went her way.

"Five hundred and fifty pounds in her possession," thought the old man; "and those words of mine—which told—in her mind. With her pride—who knows? Why did I thwart her when she wanted to be educated for the stage? I was an idiot for my pains. Percy would never have married an actress. I thwarted her, I suppose, for the pleasure of thwarting her, and dearly enough I have to pay for my self-indulgence. Not that she yielded to me—no, she yielded to Ann."

Bruna went to Ann's room before going to her own. Ann, already undressed, her fair hair hanging loose, and a pale blue wrapper thrown round her, was reading her

Bible. Bruna, seeing this, was softly retreating, when Ann looked up, laid the book reverently aside, and called to her to come in.

"Something as Mephistopheles, on the stage, appears to feel when he hears the church bells, I feel when I come upon you, sweet Saint Ann, reading your Bible."

"Ah! Bruna, if you knew, as I know, the wicked thoughts and fancies that often come crowding between me and the page I try to read and understand, you would see how it must hurt me to be spoken to in that way—what a mockery I feel it when you call me that."

"Well, then, I'll call you, instead, dear little fellow-sinner, and tell you—I asked for this for you," laying down Ann's cheque—"that you must come shopping with me to-morrow, and help me to decide what is to be the colour of the velvet dress I mean to buy—black, violet, ruby, or golden-brown—and how it is to be made, so as to

use to best advantage that old Venetian lace I've had so long laid by. You will come?"

"You know I'm always ready. I like shopping as much as you dislike it."

"You like the moral exercise of resisting temptation to buy pretty things for yourself, and of buying, instead, blankets, and flannels, and linseys, to give away. Ann, I've made up my mind about one thing to-night—that I have asked uncle for money for the last time. Come what may, I will never do it again."

"I'm very glad, dear Bruna. It so pains Percy that you should have the pain. I hope, dear, the time is very near when everything that is Percy's will be so naturally yours—that——"

"I don't know about that," Bruna interrupted abruptly. "As to the pain of asking money from uncle, I really, at times, have quite enjoyed doing it—as I might, in some moods, enjoy holding my hand in the

fire. But I'm not going to keep you awake any longer. Good night, sweet."

"Good night, dear Bruna."

"Has he ever told you he would not marry you if you were not a beggar?"

That question rang through Bruna's head as she passed along the softly-carpeted corridor to her room.

"You left the drawing-room when I was not in it, without bidding me good night," said a voice from behind her, and a detaining hand was laid softly on her shoulder.

She turned back her beautiful head.

"Good night, dear Percy," was spoken with intoxicating softness. She even turned up her face in sign that he might kiss her cheek—a most rare privilege.

"My darling, if only I could make you happy!" he exclaimed.

"Amiable, you mean, Percy."

"The two would be one with you, Bruna."

"I don't know," she answered. "Again

good night, dear," and her door closed upon her.

Setting her candle down on the already fully-lighted toilet-table, she said, sighing, "Poor Percy! beggar or heiress, you would want me—with this face." Then she added, with a scornful flush and toss—"But I don't know whether I wouldn't as soon be an heiress, wanted only for my money, as a beggar-beauty wanted only for that beauty. And what else is there in me anyone can love?"

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST ENCOUNTER.

NEXT morning Mr. Travers was standing on the hall-steps, admiring his son's horses, when the girls came down the stairs, dressed for their expedition. He turned, and saw them.

"You going too, Ann?" There was surprise and disappointment in his tone.

"Of course, sir, she is going with me. I am much too conspicuous-looking to go alone. Your son would attend me, but I don't wish it. I haven't even told him I am going."

"You are, as *you* say, much too con-

spicuous-looking—as *I* say, much too magnificently handsome to go alone. I am glad you are so discreet. But I see no need that you should take Ann."

"I hope, sir, you have never had cause to doubt my discretion?"

"I have never seen much proof of it. I am, as I say, glad you are so discreet as not to go alone, but there is no occasion for Ann's being your companion—a servant would do."

"I prefer to take Ann."

"I like to go, uncle. I should be disappointed not to go."

"I wanted you at home, my dear—to write some letters for me."

"I will write them to-morrow, uncle, or this evening."

He attended them to the carriage, and then held some low-toned dialogue with the coachman—apparently enjoining care, for, "Keep them well in hand—Miss Travers is timid," were the last words Bruna caught.

"What horses have we?" she asked Ann, when they were about a mile from the house. "I almost think the one this side is the mare Percy ordered should not be driven when we used the carriage."

"If so, Bruna, we ought to go back to have it changed."

"If we do, we shall be too late for the mid-day train. I think that horse was ordered in for my advantage—'that reckless little devil, D'Almeida, likes to go the devil's own pace,' I can fancy Mr. Travers saying to himself. A marvellous amount of attention to my likes! But he would have had the creature taken out when he found you were going too, Ann, if he had thought it really unsafe; so we won't fret."

Ann did not fully understand the drift of what Bruna said, but she urged that for Percy's sake, out of obedience to Percy's wishes, they should return."

"I will put you down, Ann, if you please, but I will not go back."

This settled it, showing Ann that all further remonstrance would be useless.

"That was an unkind answer, Bruna," Ann said, softly, after the lapse of a few minutes.

"And a very unjust one, too, Ann. I know quite well it was only of Percy, and of me as affecting Percy, that you were thinking. You are not timid, though Mr. Travers, for some reason of his own, chose to tell Drewitt you were."

Mr. Travers stood watching the horses as long as he could see them. More than once he said to himself, "If only my sweet Ann were not with her!" Probably he would not have cared to put the rest of his thoughts into words. While he still stood there, his son rode up, and asked,

"What carriage was it just crossed the park?"

"Your own. The ladies are gone to town for a day's shopping."

"Why was I not told?"

"Ask your fair and amiable mistress."

Percy rode round to the stable, returning a minute after, looking much disturbed.

"Was it by your order, sir, that chestnut mare was put into the carriage to-day?"

"It was."

"Drewitt should have known better than to obey you."

"The devil he should, should he?" The old man looked furious, and his nose took a purple tinge.

"Yes, father, he should. His not doing so will cost him his place. That mare is not broken for harness; and she is very fresh." He added, to himself, "The road there is pretty safe, as far as one dare say so; in coming back, should they get into anything like swing——"

"There is Bramble-bridge Hill for them to spin down," the old man interrupted. "A pretty place for an accident!" Then, with a change of tone, "Don't be a fool, boy, they're right enough! Do you think I

should have let Ann go if I'd thought there was any danger?"

"I had given a definite order, and it was an unpardonable piece of insubordination on Drewitt's part to disregard it. I shall go up to town by the next train, in order to return this evening with my cousins."

Half an hour afterwards he slowly took his way across the park, deep in thought. Ride as slowly as he might, he had ample time, and he went at a walking pace.

Just now it was not easy for him to find any subject for thought that was not beset by painful complications. His engagement to Bruna certainly was not that subject. Her conduct towards him grew more and more enigmatical, and he utterly failed to find the key to it. As for himself, he felt it about equally difficult to picture his life without Bruna, or to imagine her such a wife as could make a man happy, or rather such a wife as could make him happy. He believed in her as intrinsically noble and generous; she,

believing herself to be inwardly all ugly and evil, imagined him the slave of her beauty only; but this was not so. Beside his love for her stood an infinite pity; and, indeed, all the circumstances of her childhood and girlhood were monstrously pitiful. He considered her as his destiny, his work in life, the discipline of his life. Nothing she could do would ever make him think of breaking their engagement. He felt towards her, perhaps, more as a husband feels towards a wife deeply beloved, but found very faulty, than as a young lover feels towards a beautiful and capricious mistress. Nothing she could do would make him the one to break their engagement—that is to say, nothing she could do of the things he could imagine her as doing. He knew that, however different she and Ann might be in everything else, they had one thing in common—an absolute purity of heart and thought, of instinct and inclination.

The acceptance of Percy's hand had been

felt by Bruna to be deliverance from shameful bondage. She had always liked him; it was no wonder if the warmth of her gratitude made her mistake (if it were mistake) that liking for love. For a few weeks after her engagement, she had been happier than ever in her life before. Then she began to doubt her own heart, and, at the same time, dimly to understand something of the sacrifices Percy made if she married him. She was tossed on a heaving sea of conflicting impulses; the rebound of the very wave which drove her on to the rock of one resolution washed her off it and out to sea again. It would cost her much to give up Percy—even the triumph it would be to Mr. Travers that she should do so would cause her an exceeding bitter pang. It seemed needful that she should decide soon what course she meant to take. Lately Percy had urged on her that they should be married soon. He wanted to take her away from Beech-holmes, from all its evil

and painful and hurtful associations. Even from "sweet sister Ann" he wished, for a time, to separate her, both for his own sake, because the never-failing gentle goodness of the woman he did not love with the love of love, contrasted so painfully with the capricious ill-humours of the woman he did love, and for Bruna's sake, who often said that Ann's serene saintliness provoked her to be the greater sinner.

Percy's plan was that, once married, he and Bruna should travel—should go where Bruna pleased, for as long as she pleased. He fancied that, in this way, her restlessness might wear itself out. A few years, he thought, their "Wander-jahre" would make her weary of change, and long for a resting-place—a home. They would then be both young still, and life would begin. Bruna was not twenty, he not much past twenty.

This is how Percy planned for himself and Bruna. If he spared any thought for "sweet sister Ann," he concluded that, of

course, "Ann would marry." Till she did so, her position at Beech-holmes was so different from anything poor Bruna's had ever been. Old Mr. Travers respected Ann's character and Ann's wealth. And then Ann seemed always occupied and always happy; her days were full of gentle and beneficent interests.

Thinking of Ann, Percy believed he could read her heart and life like an open book; and all the while there was in them so sacred a mystery, that Ann herself, dimly conscious of its presence, averted her eyes from its veiled face. In those eyes of Ann's, and about her mouth, there was a something that seemed to pronounce her as among those happy ones (if there are such) "born good," within whom is a fountain of unfailing peace.

Percy had an hour or two in town, which he devoted to the gratification of some latest caprice of Bruna's; then he was at the station a quarter of an hour before the train

should start, watching for his cousins. When only five minutes remained, his look-out became rather anxious, as this was the last train to-night that stopped at the small station from which Beech-holmes was approached. For use on these occasions a carriage was kept at a West-end livery stable, the Beech-holmes coachman telegraphing his order as to the train it was to meet, overnight, when he received his own instructions. It was for this carriage, of course, that Percy was watching; and two hansom cabs that were dashing towards the station did not attract his attention. He was, therefore, taken completely by surprise when the man who sprang out of the first greeted him with a most powerful clap on the shoulder and wring of the hand.

"Malcolm!"

"Can you take me in for a few days at your place? When a man's going to Africa, he doesn't look forward to a very speedy or certain return. I thought I should like a

few days with you before starting. Come along. I've my ticket to get, and my portmanteau to see to. I'll dine with you, at any rate."

"You'll do much more than that, or I'll not easily forgive you. Good heavens!" was his exclamation, as, at that instant, the second hansom drew up.

"Heroines of the Hansom, or the Mysteries of——I beg your pardon."

Mr. Malcolm grew furiously red as he perceived his mistake.

"What madness!" Percy cried, angrily, as Ann got out, innocently smiling, and Bruna followed, also smiling, but not so innocently. "What is the meaning of this?" Percy asked sternly.

"There is no particular meaning," answered Bruna. "I like a hansom cab—I shall try one again."

"I didn't know it was wrong, Percy," pleaded Ann. "It felt odd, and people stared. There was some mistake about the

carriage to-day—it was not here to meet us."

"You've been about London in that thing all the afternoon?"

"Yes," said Bruna, "you can pay the man accordingly; he has been very civil. It was not our fault this time, but it will be next. We liked it," she added, as, the man paid, Percy came back to her.

"Bruna, you shouldn't say that. It is not true. You did not like it," remonstrated Ann.

"Train just going, sir," from a porter who knew Percy.

They had but just time to get into the carriage kept for them. As it was, Mr. Malcolm started without ticket or portmanteau. The latter, he roared an order out of the window, should be forwarded as soon as possible. Then the ceremony of introducing him to the ladies was performed by Percy.

"You followed with flattering prompti-

tude upon the receipt of Percy's letter," said Bruna, graciously.

"I have not heard from Travers for many a day," was Mr. Malcolm's answer, looking to Percy for an explanation.

"I had not got further than thinking of writing to you, to ask you to come to us before you started."

"This is an accidental meeting, then?" asked Bruna.

"The meeting at the station was accidental, but I was on my way to Beechholmes."

After that Ann and Bruna took no part in the conversation, which was carried on with great energy between the other two. They were both tired, and Ann was depressed by the consciousness that Percy was displeased with them.

CHAPTER V.

HOW HOSTILITIES BEGAN.

IT was quite dusk when they got into the carriage to drive to Beech-holmes; darker than it would be presently, when the moon would have risen.

"Remember Bramble-bridge Hill," was Percy's concluding caution to the coachman. "Better walk them all the way to Beech-holmes, than run the least risk of their doing more than walk down there."

Ann and Bruna, leaning back in their respective corners, were still quite quiet. Percy and Mr. Malcolm again plunged deep into talk. Ann had got over her slight depression of spirits, for Percy had spoken to

her quite as kindly as usual again. She listened with keen interest to all that passed, admiringly accepting everything said by Percy. All he said rang true, to her intelligence, though it was, or she believed it to be, far beyond anything she would have been able to think on her own account.

It was Mr. Malcolm who by-and-by asked, "Are we anywhere near the hill you spoke of, Travers? It seems to me our pace is somewhat fast and furious, unless you have full confidence in your horses and coachman."

"I have confidence in neither," was Percy's quick answer, with an inward curse on his own carelessness in not having noticed the rapidly-increasing rate at which they were going. "We must be a long way from the hill yet, however," he added, as he let down the glass, and leant out.

At first he could not be exactly certain where they were.

"Pull them in," he presently shouted.

"Pull at them for your life! Pull them in!"

"Is anything to be done?" asked Mr. Malcolm. "Surely the man is drunk," he added, for the pace was increasing rather than diminishing.

"Drewitt never drinks," said Ann. "He must have lost all control over the horses."

She was leaning forward, very pale, instinctively holding Percy's arm with both her hands.

"He won't jump out—he knows that would be madness."

Mr. Malcolm smiled reassuringly into the anxious little face, on which, the light of the carriage-lamp fell, and his smile was kind and pleasant, almost affectionate. Percy drew his head in for a moment.

"I think the pace is slightly slackening now—the fellow is pulling with all his might." Then he added, in Mr. Malcolm's ear, "If he doesn't get the better of them in the next few seconds, God help us all!"

"Surely there is something my strong arms can do, Miss Travers!" Mr. Malcolm exclaimed. "To sit passive and wait for what is to come, is not at all in my line."

He turned round to examine the construction of the carriage, but a little cry from Ann attracted his attention to the fact that Miss D'Almeida's hand was on the handle of the carriage-door, evidently attempting to open it. He removed the hand, and held it in a grasp that, unconsciously to himself, was tight enough to hurt her; and the look he turned on her contrasted strongly with that he had just given Ann.

"Surely, Miss D'Almeida, you are not contemplating an act so cowardly, so stupid, so suicidal as that of jumping out?" he asked.

She did not answer, but tried, with some determination, to free her hand.

"Listen," he went on, not yet releasing it, "a way of helping us has occurred to me, but I am useless if I must watch and restrain

a mad woman. By sitting still you have a chance of escaping injury, even if the worst happens. If you throw yourself out, you will certainly be maimed and disfigured, probably killed. Will you give your word not to attempt it?"

She answered him with a sullen "Yes."

"May I rely upon your word?"

"About that you can do as you please."

"Of course you can rely upon her word—you should not have asked that," Ann said.

Mr. Malcolm freed Bruna's hand instantly. A moment after he had let down the glass behind him, had scrambled, awkwardly enough, through the window, and had taken the reins from the coachman's hands. It was a mere question of brute force—his powerful arms were fresh and unwearied, the man's had been fast losing all strength. The horses were, for the moment, checked, almost stopped, by the violence with which he tugged at them. Probably he might not

have been able to restrain them long; but in that moment, during which they were almost stopped, Percy, gently pushing off Ann's hold, sprang out, and went to the head of the restive chestnut mare. The footman, then jumping down, went to the other side, and the danger was over—a thing of the past.

Mr. Malcolm kept the reins, and the coachman took Percy's place at the mare's head. Percy went to the carriage-door.

"I should like you both to get out and walk down the hill," he said to Ann and Bruna.

"Have you in any way hurt yourself, Percy? You look so white."

"I slightly wrenched my foot, Ann, in getting out. But that is nothing. That wouldn't make me look white."

Ann bent her head, and kissed the hand that was helping her to get out. Percy kissed her cheek, and then turned from her eagerly to Bruna.

"Thank God! thank God! that I have you safe and unharmed!" he whispered; and he held her for a moment close against him; and, after, kept her hand upon his arm, against his heart.

Bruna did not speak. It was some moments before anybody spoke—except the men, in coaxing and soothing the horses. Then Percy said,

"It is to Malcolm's strong arms and quick-witted presence of mind that we owe our deliverance, humanly speaking.

Bruna answered, "I suppose so," in a tone of sullen indifference or anger; but Ann could not help saying,

"I think we owe at least as much to you, dear Percy."

"The break's out of order, sir, and won't grip. It's that as threw me out," explained the coachman.

"Whose duty is it to see that things are in order? But your fault neither begins nor ends there, Drewitt. I shall have a

word to speak to you in the morning."

The man would far rather have been blown up and sworn at than addressed in this quiet fashion. His only hope was in imploring "Miss Ann's" intercession, for the sake of his wife and children.

Mr. Malcolm chose to drive down the hill; the others walked. Before they reached the bottom—it was almost a mile-long hill—Percy discovered that his foot was badly injured; the pain was severe, and increased rapidly. Ann was quick to become aware of this, and to propose that he should lean on Bruna's arm and hers. Bruna's was given silently, without a word of sympathy—she seemed absorbed, pre-occupied.

"What sort of road to Beech-holmes now?" asked Mr. Malcolm, when they were all at the foot of the hill. The question was asked of Percy, but the footman answered,

"Quite safe and straight now, sir."

Mr. Malcolm descended, and the coachman resumed his place.

"Old fellow, what's the matter with you?" he asked Percy, directly he saw him closer.

The moon was up now, and it was quite light. Ann explained. On that he almost lifted Percy into the carriage, settling his hurt foot among the cushions very skilfully. Then he turned to help the ladies. Ann got in at once. Most unexpectedly Bruna declined to do so.

"I shall walk," she said.

"Dear Bruna, it is more than three miles, and Percy is too much hurt to go with you."

Percy had quietly fainted, as both Ann and Mr. Malcolm had feared he was about to do, and consequently took no part in the discussion.

"Allow me to help you in," said Mr. Malcolm, with outstretched hand.

"Did you not hear me say I should walk?"

"I supposed you would abandon that, if

I may venture to say so, not over-wise resolution, at the request of your friend."

"I neither form nor abandon resolutions so lightly as you appear to imagine. Get in, Mr. Malcolm. John," to the grey-headed footman, "you can follow me across the park. I mean to walk."

"Then I will walk too," Ann said, but she said it hesitatingly. She was divided between her wish to be with Percy, and to ascertain how much he was suffering, and her conviction that he would prefer she should not separate herself from Bruna. As was usual with Ann, her own wish gave way.

But Mr. Malcolm authoritatively interposed.

"Miss Travers, you had better remain with your cousin. If Miss D'Almeida chooses to walk, she must submit to the infliction of my attendance."

Mr. Malcolm gave the word, and the carriage rolled on, leaving him stand-

ing with Bruna in the broad moonlight.

"Why do you choose to walk, Miss D'Almeida? Are you afraid to share whatever danger Travers and his cousin run?"

"I understand your sneer, Mr. Malcolm," Bruna answered, beginning to walk rapidly. "I do not believe there is any danger. But my nerves have been shaken. I simply could not get into the carriage again to-night. A contemptible want of self-control, you think? I quite agree with you in that thought."

They soon came to a small gate in the fence that ran one side of the road.

"This is our way," said Bruna, passing through.

The way was only a narrow footpath, diagonally crossing the park. Bruna walked first, Mr. Malcolm followed her. Neither of them spoke till they came into a broader road, where they walked side by side. Then Mr. Malcolm began to speak of Ann—praising her coolness and courage, her self-

forgetfulness and her loving anxiety for Percy.

"Ann is always Ann," was Bruna's answer. She added, "When you have been with us a few days you will know what we mean by that."

"I know already. I am by no means unread in the chronicles of Beech-holmes. I was prepared to expect any amount of sweetness in Miss Travers, but I was not prepared to expect so much quiet courage in her——"

"Nor," supplemented Bruna, "so much flagrant cowardice in Miss D'Almeida. As to courage," Bruna went on, after a short silence which Mr. Malcolm did not seem inclined to break, "it seems to me that people who don't by any means deserve it, often get credit for courage; mere want of imagination and stupidity often pass for courage. In saying this I am not thinking of Ann—though Ann is not imaginative. But I don't see what Ann had to fear. Ann

is 'a sincere believer,' if there are any such; and Heaven is, I suppose, believed by such to be a desirable exchange for earth—why, therefore, should Ann fear to meet with sudden death? I do fear death. I have formed no imagination of either heaven or hell that makes me desire an earlier acquaintance with either than is inevitable."

"Do you find life satisfying, then? I should not have imagined so by the tone of your voice, by the expression of your face, nor by anything I have heard of you."

"I have not tried it. I wish to do so."

"Do you read French novels, Miss D'Almeida?"

"Why do you ask, Mr. Malcolm?"

"Well, you talk something in the strain of the heroine of one I lately read. A very high-flown heroine; a young person of exalted sentiments. Don't fancy my question was asked, or my remark made, in any disparaging sense."

Bruna sought about for some bitter words

to say. Not finding them, she remained silent. She felt insulted by Mr. Malcolm's tone, and yet did not know what to take hold of. She began to think his presence, for which she had wished as an excitement, might prove intolerably painful, unless in some way she could get the upper hand in their intercourse. By-and-by she remarked, in a carless tone,

"I suppose, Mr. Malcolm, I am to consider that the terms on which we meet are those of more or less polite hostility?"

"Why should you so suppose, Miss D'Almeida?"

"I may as well confess that I fell into the trap you set for me when you made your sister write as she did to Ann. I am therefore aware of the opinion formed by 'an impartial person' of the sort of influence I am on your friend's life, 'the paralyser of his usefulness, the blight upon his happiness, the canker at the core of his existence!' I suppose you were adapting yourself to what

you considered the style of a young lady's letter, when you suggested that eloquent passage. But in other parts the masculine fist betrayed itself."

Mr. Malcolm did not feel exactly comfortable.

"I could say a great deal in my own excuse, if I chose," he began.

"So could I," was Bruna's quick answer.

"I don't suppose a woman could understand the sort of love I've had for Percy. It is truer and more unselfish love than a woman can feel."

"That is modest."

"It is true. If he'd been worthily beloved, it might still have been trying to me to see him in the befooled condition of a lover, 'assotted upon a woman,' as my favourite Sir Dinadan calls it, as it is—— Miss D'Almeida, am I to blame for the turn this conversation has taken?"

"When I find you to blame, Mr. Malcolm, I will let you know. As to this conversa-

tion, it has, I think, gone far enough."

She spoke with haughty weariness, as if tired of him, herself, and all things. They finished their walk in silence. Their way had been so much shorter than the carriage-road that the carriage arrived only just before them.

Percy had made Ann very happy by saying to her, "You behaved admirably, Ann—just as a woman should!" But Ann was too unselfish not to have that happiness destroyed by the heavy sigh which followed Percy's words. She felt she could have given up the sweetness of his praise of her if she could have exchanged it for the sweetness to him of being able to praise Bruna.

CHAPTER VI.

"ANN'S DAY."—THE MORNING OF IT.

MR. MALCOLM'S first day at Beech-holmes was Sunday—"Ann's day," as Bruna called it, saying that Ann was more Ann than ever on that day. Ann and Mr. Malcolm were the only two of the party who appeared at the breakfast-table. Bruna had not chosen to get up that morning; old Mr. Travers was never visible till a much later hour—a fact for which his family were thankful; Percy had passed a feverish night, in great pain, and was under strict medical orders not to put his foot to the ground.

Mr. Malcolm asked permission to attend Ann to morning service, so they walked together across the park to the little old grey church. Ann was not in the habit of studying her own preferences, and Mr. Malcolm was Percy's friend, or she would much rather have gone alone. That Sunday morning walk through the silent shining park, where the unstirred gossamers made a silvery net-work pearled with dew, where the September sunshine seemed a-dream, or listening to the beautiful Beechholmes bells, made an impression upon Mr. Malcolm. There was not much said between him and his companion, but Mr. Malcolm liked that walk with a deep and peculiar liking. He liked the whole morning—the sitting beside Ann, in her atmosphere, as it were, listening to the music, which was mellow and good, looking at the sunlight that streamed through a dim, rich window, and not listening to the sermon, but thinking his own thoughts; and then afterwards the

walk home again—sometimes in the shadow of the beeches, sometimes in the open shine of the thyme-turfed glades. It was very different from any recent experience of his, and he liked it.

"It wouldn't do to do that kind of thing often," he remarked to Percy. "I should soon grow to feel so self-complacently 'good.'"

"It could only be a very elementary phase of acquaintance with Ann, and of Ann's influence, that could make you feel that."

"I didn't know I was speaking especially of Miss Travers; but no doubt you are right, and I was. I have crossed beautiful parks on exquisite September mornings, and have now and then, not too often, attended service at little old quiet grey village churches, where the light and the music were rich and mellow, but I don't remember that any of it ever seemed to me as it seemed this morning. No doubt Miss Tra-

vers was the very spirit of it all—what bosh I am talking! As you say, there's no danger of one's feeling 'good' in Miss Travers's company. I feel a great, coarse, rough-handed and fiery-headed brute, yet with it all a *ganz frommes Thier*. I nearly laughed, most inappropriately, this morning as it occurred to me that I must be looking so like that nondescript beast grown pious in the fair company of the saints, and meekly kneeling, while it holds a cross, prayer-book, or Bible, which some of the very old masters were fond of introducing into their sacred compositions. I had in my head a finely-characteristic specimen I saw in the Museo Borbonico, at Naples, by either Luca di Leyde or Van der Weyder, I cannot clearly remember which; and the idea was almost too much for my gravity."

"Well, Ann, and how did you and that ferocious-looking, red-headed Celt get on?" was Bruna's first question when she and Ann met that afternoon.

"Mr. Malcolm was very kind and quiet," was Ann's answer.

"I hope, Ann, it's not the deceitful, quiet kindness of the wolf who is going to gobble up the simple little lamb. Mr. Malcolm is not fit for you, Ann—he's not a good man. Don't let his church-going, his quiet kindness and pretty behaviour deceive you, Ann. I'm sure he's not a good man."

"But, Bruna, if he were not, he would hardly be Percy's friend. He's not only Percy's friend, but Percy admires him—says he is noble-minded, generous, and unselfish."

"Percy, like Ann, is, in some things, singularly simple. I tell you, Ann, this Mr. Malcolm is not a good man."

"But, Bruna, what do you know about Mr. Malcolm? Absolutely nothing but what Percy has told us, and that has all been to his friend's advantage. It seems so unnatural that you should so set yourself against Percy's friend."

"Percy spends upon his friend some of

that exaggerating enthusiasm which ought all to be reserved for me. As to what I know about Mr. Malcolm, I have instincts about people which never deceive me. With time, I would undertake to prove that Mr. Malcolm, under sufficient temptation, would show himself to be ungenerous, selfish, false, a traitor—in fact, the opposite of all Percy thinks him."

"Oh! Bruna, why should you say such things about Percy's friend?"

"I have very little doubt," Bruna went on, not heeding Ann's interruption, "that Mr. Malcolm has, at some time or other—perhaps before Percy knew him; he is much older than Percy—led a bad life. I mean what even the world would call a bad life."

"If he were that sort of man, Percy could not think of him as he does."

"Obstinate little monkey! Probably Percy himself is far more of a sinner than you could ever believe him to be. There,

you look shocked and grieved enough. But indeed, Ann, I think it not unlikely that men we call 'good' are, in reality, about what we, in our ignorant imaginations, picture 'bad' men as being; while the bad men—the 'really bad' men—are beyond our imaginations."

"I wonder, Bruna, what makes you talk in such a painful way this afternoon?"

"I wonder, Ann, whether there is any truth in anything I've been saying? I think there is; and yet I can't understand what there is the 'really bad' men can be and do. Vice and crime can't be limitless and inexhaustible any more than anything else. As the conqueror longs for new worlds to conquer, these monsters must long for new crimes to perpetrate."

Ann kept a pained silence, and presently Bruna said,

"I cannot fancy how anyone can ever feel this life (in which we are

'—Wie ein Thier, auf dürrer Heide
Von einem bösen Geist im Kreis herum geführt,
Und rings umher liegt schöne grüne Weide,')

so far, enough, as to be able to believe it all. 'Schöne grüne Weide,'" she repeated, dreamily—"where, when, how to get to it—to anything that is not dust and ashes. However, this is, according to Mr. Malcolm, the heroine of a French novel sort of talk. Heaven knows it is true enough talk! What did you say, Ann?"

Ann repeated the question with which she had interrupted Bruna's monologue—"Have you been to see Percy to-day, Bruna?"

"No—have you, Ann? I needn't ask; you don't forget the sick and suffering. How is his foot this morning?"

Bruna coloured a little asking the question, having the grace to feel that it was rather late in the day to ask it.

"It is not quite so painful as it was all night; but it is very seriously hurt, Bruna."

"Poor fellow!—I'm sorry!"

"He won't be able to get downstairs for a good while, but he has had himself wheeled into his study. You'll go and see him some time this afternoon, before you go down to dinner, won't you, dear?" Ann asked, coaxingly, as if pleading for a personal favour.

"Of course, if he wishes it."

"Oh! Bruna, you know how he wishes it! He has asked me so many anxious questions about you. He is so afraid the shock of last night, and then the fatigue of that long walk, may have made you ill."

"He is very good, always much too good. I'll go and sit with him a quarter of an hour before I go down to dinner."

"Thank you, dear." And Ann kissed her.

Bruna warmly returned the kiss, and then, looking into Ann's eyes, she smiled a strange smile, moisture coming into her own. She

seemed about to speak, but she said nothing till Ann had by-and-by left her; then she said,

"I think I have been thinking to some purpose this morning. I think I begin to see how it may be done. A splendid combination, if all should go well."

But she did not seem to have had enough of thinking; for the next few hours she did little else, leaving herself not much more than enough time to dress for dinner. She went through that ceremony hurriedly, but not carelessly; and when she was ready, without, as usual, waiting for Ann, she went to Percy's study-door. She knocked before she turned the handle, and some one said, "Come in."

The room had a west aspect, and a large bay-window formed one end of it. Percy was on a sofa in this window, and on the floor, the last red sunlight firing his red hair in a quite alarming manner, lay Mr. Malcolm.

"Don't get up," commanded Mr. Malcolm, as Percy moved.

"No, Percy, lie quiet, there's a good boy," said Bruna, and quickly crossed the room to his side.

She put her hand on his shoulder, was touched by some expression of wistfulness and of suffering in his face, and stooped her lips to his forehead. Percy coloured furiously, and not with pleasure. The coldest reserve would have been less painful to him in his friend's presence than that affectionate "there's a good boy" and frank kiss; but he retained her hand, and raised it to his lips. It was her left hand he held. Her right she stretched out to Mr. Malcolm, who by this time had gathered his great awkward length up from the ground, and acknowledged her presence by an ungainly sort of bow. Bruna smiled upon him her most fascinatingly gracious smile, as she said,

"We can hardly be considered to have seen each other till now. Remembering

how things would probably have gone with us but for you, I am sorry to know that last night I spoke no single word of acknowledgment. I was unnerved by the alarm, and was not myself. This morning I felt ashamed of last night's behaviour."

To Percy this gracious self-accusation seemed as admirable as, from Bruna, it seemed wonderful. He was vexed with the cold manner of his friend's acknowledgment.

"You over-rate my services, Miss D'Almeida. What I did would have been useless, perhaps worse than useless, if Travers had not seconded me. And he is the only sufferer."

"I was thanking Mr. Malcolm for what Mr. Malcolm had done. I was not speaking of whether less or more had been done by Mr. Travers. To Mr. Travers I owe so much that anything last night added to the debt is below calculation."

The tone, for Mr. Malcolm, in that sentence, was very haughty, for Percy very

tender. And yet, Bruna standing there, one hand resting on Percy's shoulder, it occurred to Mr. Malcolm to picture Ann on Percy's other side, and to think of the two women as representing the one his good, and the other his evil genius.

Bruna was in splendid beauty, and the dress she wore seemed, by its daring simplicity, to challenge attention for that splendour of beauty. It was creamy white, and of soft-falling, noiseless silk. It flowed in unbroken lines from throat to feet, just slightly drawn in at her waist by a silken cord; she wore no ornament—neither flower, jewel, nor ribbon; her face seemed to shine with white light reflected from the soft-gleaming dress, and now, behind her, was a background of most intense crimson.

"By heaven, she's magnificent!" was Mr. Malcolm's thought.

Bruna read the thought in his eyes, and hers glowed with triumph. Muttering some words about dressing for dinner,

Mr. Malcolm got himself out of the room.

"Your friend is not graceful," was Bruna's comment.

"He is all sorts of things that are ever so much better. A thousand thanks to you, dear Bruna, for your gracious words and way to him."

"You thank me for worse than nothing —if I was gracious, I had, in all probability, whether I knew it or not, some sinister motive for being so."

"You don't like Malcolm?"

"Mr. Malcolm is not a man to be liked. You love him; I, possibly, may soon hate him. But enough of Mr. Malcolm for the present. About this poor foot, Percy, are you in much pain from it now?"

The tone in which this was asked was intoxicatingly soft, for Bruna meant to be kind; she was, nevertheless, quite careless of his answer, from pre-occupation.

"It is nothing worth calling pain. No pain of mine could be worth calling pain,

while I can see you standing by me unhurt —my splendid darling!"

He looked up at her with eyes of adoration. He was not ordinarily demonstrative; his love was quiet and grave; but, thinking of last evening's possibilities, his heart burned within him. He drew her down to him, held her to him with almost a sob of passionate gratitude; his arm for the moment was very strong. But after that moment she freed herself, sat down in the window, out of his reach, and said, dreamily, her eyes fixed on the glowing sky,

"And yet, Percy, the day may come when you will say, 'Better she had died;' when I may even say, 'Better I had been maimed and disfigured for life than——.' Who can tell what the 'than' may be? But I don't pretend I am not glad to be alive and to be unharmed. I thank you, Percy, I thank Mr. Malcolm, if I knew how I would thank God, that we were saved." There was a grave pause. Then Bruna

said, in a changed tone, "By-the-by, Percy, what a stage-novelty a fiery-headed Mephistopheles would be! When I act Gretchen I will insist that the Mephistopheles of the piece shall be, by nature or art, as flamingly red-headed as Mr. Malcolm."

"When?" echoed Percy, but a shade of uneasiness crossed his face.

"Mr. Malcolm's friendship for you, Percy, is, I should say, of the nature of Mephisto's for Faust."

"Why you should say so unkind and untrue a thing, I can't tell, Bruna. His friendship for me has been firm and faithful. It has been tried in many ways, and not found wanting."

"It can't have been tried in any crucial manner. For instance, you have never, I suppose, both loved the same woman, and proved which would be the first to say, as Segwarides says to Sir Tristam de Liones, 'As for that, I will never hate a noble knight for a light lady.'"

"For a light lady neither of us would ever love or hate."

"Sir, that I know not. For a lady light enough to make both of you care for her, you might both care. But here comes no light lady, but a lady of light. Come in, Ann, I was waiting for you—we will go down together."

"A man could hardly have two more radiant visitants," said Percy, looking kindly at Ann. "Ann, you have quite won Malcolm. I have never heard him speak so warmly of a woman before."

"I am glad your friend should like me, Percy."

"Always neat and appropriate," commented Bruna, not without a touch of bitterness. Then she kissed Ann, put her hand within her arm, nodded to Percy, and they went out together.

When the door closed behind them, Percy leant his head back on the sofa cushions, with a look of pain and weari-

ness. It needed that one should understand much that had gone before between Percy and Bruna, and had left Percy's heart sad and sore and full of apprehension, to know why Bruna's light speech about Gretchen and Mephistopheles should be felt by Percy so heavily.

"When I act Gretchen," not, even, "if ever I act Gretchen," she had said this time.

Percy's nightmare-like dread about Bruna was that, stung to desperation by his father from without, or mastered by some uncontrollable impulse from within, she might one day break loose from him, from Beechholmes, from all civilized, social life, and go her magnificent way to splendid ruin! That Bruna had the "taint" of Bohemianism, of lawlessness, of genius in her blood, was always being dinned into his ears by his father. When once, at some private theatricals, he had seen Bruna act, he had been thrilled and horrified by the power and the *abandon* of the exhibition, by the complete-

ness with which Bruna had been merged in the character she represented.

To Bruna that affair had been as the first taste of blood to some wild creature. The restraint she had put upon herself, in order not to yield to the temptation of a second exercise of the kind, had, at the same time, shown a stronger love for Percy than she had ever acknowledged to herself, and had, by the strain it had been upon her, the nervous irritation it had cost her, made her ever since treat him worse than she had ever done before. And yet Bruna knew that the life of an actress would yield her no satisfaction; she wanted realities—to live, not to represent life. For one so young and so utterly without personal experience, Bruna was singularly clear and deep-sighted. This added to her unhappiness rather than to her happiness. She saw the unreality and worthlessness of things, without finding the secret that might have given all things reality and worth.

CHAPTER VII.

"ANN'S DAY."—THE EVENING OF IT.

WHEN the girls entered the drawing-room, they found Mr. Travers and Mr. Malcolm there. The old man brushed Ann's cheek with his moustache; then, bending low before Bruna, in answer to her profound courtesy, he congratulated her, with a mockery he took no pains to conceal, on last night's escape. Her acknowledgment was worthy of his congratulation. Mr. Malcolm's observant eyes read the mutual hatred.

When dinner was over, and the girls had left the room, Mr. Travers drew his chair close to Mr. Malcolm's, and grew confi-

dential. (Unrestrained by his son's presence, he had already taken more than enough wine.)

"You find a small family-party here, Mr. Malcolm, but one bound together by cordial feelings—the loving and the hating among us is alike strong. For instance, I may as well tell you what you would soon become aware of from personal observation, that my feeling towards my future daughter-in-law is so intense"—(here his lip and nose curled to their nastiest expression,)—"that I'd literally rather see your friend, my unfortunate son, lying dead at my feet this moment than know he will marry her! She'll bring him to disgrace and ruin!—she'll load him with shame and infamy!—she'll——"

But here Mr. Malcolm interrupted.

"Excuse me, sir, but I feel it hardly becomes me to sit silent and listen to such an attack upon the lady who is to be my friend's wife. Moreover, it is difficult to

understand how so young a creature as Miss D'Almeida can already have merited so evil a judgment."

"Already under the spell of her beauty! It seemed to me the gipsy was laying herself out to attract you. And so a few soft looks and words, and you espouse her cause. You're not the man I took you to be. I've been hoping something from your influence with your friend; but if you are already won over——"

"I am not won over, and I espouse no woman's cause. I'd cut off my hand to set Percy free from her. At the same time I can't sit quiet and hear obliquy that must be, as yet, unmerited, poured out on a woman, and that woman the object of my friend's worship."

"Her father was the devil incarnate, and she's his very own daughter."

"I have heard much good of Miss D'Almeida's mother."

"There's nothing of her mother in her—

nothing. Her mother was—— Good heavens, how I loved her mother!"

"It is curious, then, sir, there should be in your heart no grain of tenderness or of toleration for the daughter."

"If I were a maudlin milksop like my son there might be, or if in anything she reminded me of her mother; but she's her father's own daughter, every drop of her blood, and he, as I said, was the Devil incarnate!"

Mr. Malcolm for a time tolerated his host's conversation, just parrying his speeches, afraid to contradict him or to argue with him, lest anger should produce apoplexy—a fear naturally suggested by the swollen and inflamed face, the fierce redness of which was the more conspicuous from the snow-whiteness of the bushy eyebrows and moustache. At last, feeling he could bear it no longer, he rose with ill-concealed disgust, saying he would join the ladies.

"Ladies there are not in this house. There

is a lady, my sweet Ann—a lady and an heiress. The D'Almeida girl is no lady—she's a gipsy-beggar—a dependent on my charity for the bread she eats! From her impudence you would not guess it; but she's a bold hussy—a——"

Mr. Malcolm escaped. He was glad to notice that the old butler hovering outside immediately went into the room, and began to clear the table of bottles and decanters. The drawing-room was empty when he entered it. The girls were in the music-room, which opened out of it. Ann was at the organ, making Sunday music, softly playing over sacred harmonies, hymns, chants, chorales.

The room still held some lingering of the twilight that would soon imperceptibly change to moonlight; a lamp had been lighted in it, but turned so low that it only showed the softest glimmer through its porcelain shade. Mr. Malcolm, standing in the doorway, could see the shining of Ann's

face, and could just tell where Bruna was by the gleam of her dress. The windows were open, and the air was fresh and sweet, with the freshness and sweetness of a warm early Autumn dusk. Ann was playing, with a finished purity and restrained power that showed her to be mistress of the instrument she touched; and what she was playing at the moment he began to listen was grand and simple, full of quaint majesty.

For perhaps half an hour Mr. Malcolm stood in the door-way, unseen and unsuspected. Ann played on and on, passing without pause from one memory to another; and Bruna's dress grew more white out of the gloom, as softly-clouded moonlight gained upon the fading twilight. Then suddenly, with a sort of cry that startled him by its strange unexpectedness, Bruna rose and swept swiftly through the room to Ann's side.

"Ann, Ann, Ann, I can bear no more!" she cried, taking Ann's hands from the keys.

"Ann, Ann, Ann, you are killing me!" This was wailed out rather than spoken, and she laid her head on Ann's shoulder.

Mr. Malcolm had not remained unmoved by Ann's music. Passing out of the heated, wine-scented dining-room, and from listening to an evil-tongued and evil-thoughted old man's words of hatred, into the atmosphere of the flower-scented dim room, full of harmony, the surprise of contrast had touched him, and now Bruna's wail thrilled him. He tried to withdraw himself from the door-way noiselessly; but, being awkward, he overset a chair in the attempt. Bruna was erect and *moqueuse* immediately.

"You there, Mr. Malcolm! I didn't know I had a companion in purgatory. I suppose you have been standing on one leg, and drawing the other up in agony, as Mephistopheles does—on the stage—when he hears the church-bells. My manifestation of torture was, if less expressive, at least, I hope, more graceful."

"I cannot imagine Miss D'Almeida as otherwise than graceful under any circumstances."

"Never a graceless sinner?" she asked. Then added, "And I could never have imagined Mr. Malcolm so graciously courteous." As she spoke she suddenly turned up the shaded lamp. Its light fell full upon Mr. Malcolm, and she looked at him curiously. In the red glow of his chestnut eyes she found an unexpected expression of pity, of softness, of almost kindness.

"Ah! I see, you have been with St. Ann in her chapel!" she said.

"Yes, I have been with St. Ann in her chapel—instead of grinning from outside at the sound of its bells," was his answer.

"Talking of bells," said Ann, as she blushingly rose from the organ, and moved towards the tea-table in the drawing-room, to which the others followed her, "I suppose, Mr. Malcolm, you noticed our Beech-holmes

bells this morning?—they are considered very beautiful."

Ann wished to change the tone of the conversation. There was something about it from which she instinctively shrank; but, before Mr. Malcolm could answer her, Bruna interrupted—

"Those bells! To me they are unendurable; but then so are almost all beautiful things. Do you like the Summer, Mr. Malcolm?"

"Most decidedly, Miss D'Almeida."

"So does Ann—extremes meet. I stand between you, and to me the Summer-time is an intolerable time. I am always glad when the rough Autumn winds begin to tear and rend at the beauty of the world; they clear away the oppression of Summer wealth of perfume and fulness of song, and make room for one to breathe. After all, I don't believe you can like the Summer. I don't see on what principle you can like it. One must be either very happy, very good, or

very stupid, to like it; and I'm sure, Mr. Malcolm, you are neither. The idea of 'beauty' making any ordinary human being 'glad!' To me it is the most intensely melancholy thing in existence."

"All that you have been saying, Miss D'Almeida, is of the nature shallow-profound, it seems to me. I think I understand what you mean; but it is only the melodramatic phase of youth in a peculiar temperament that speaks, nothing that is according to the Eternal Truth of Things."

"Eternal Truth of Things! Three out of the four words with capital letters, of course, Mr. Malcolm!"

"Of course, Miss D'Almeida."

"Well, when I look at Ann's face as she sits at her open window, on a fine Summer Sunday morning, and listens to the Beech-holmes bells, I see that she is satisfied —that she, at such times, experiences a foretaste of heaven. Is it the 'melodramatic phase of youth in a peculiar temperament'

that makes me feel the same thing that soothes her with blissful satisfaction rouse in me an intolerable madness of—I will say, not knowing what else to say, dissatisfaction?"

"It is that, or something else." He was marvelling at the splendid brightness of her eyes.

"Exactly," she said—"it is that, or something else. It occurs to me that I, as well as Ann, experience a foretaste of heaven when I listen to those intolerable bells—of what Ann's heaven would prove to me; for it seems to me quite likely that some of us—you and I, Mr. Malcolm, for instance—may find the hell of our hell in sharing with such as Ann in the heaven of their heaven."

"Your unhesitating assumption as to my destination might be unflattering, were it not for the association of yourself with myself," Mr. Malcolm observed.

"May I give you a cup of tea, Mr. Malcolm?" asked Ann.

"Ann, give me a cup for Percy. I will take it up to him."

Ann looked pleased, and took care not to say that Percy had already had tea taken to him.

Bruna ought to have been touched—perhaps she was—by the surprised gladness of Percy's face when she appeared. She set the cup on the little table that stood beside him, and seated herself for a few moments by his fire, shading her face from its light with her hand, and stretching one pretty slender foot to its warmth.

"I have left your friend and Ann to improve each other's acquaintance. You told Ann he seemed much charmed by her."

"Do you think, Bruna, Malcolm would have a chance with Ann?"

"Would you like to think he had?" she asked.

"Of all things. Malcolm would have

the sweetest wife in the world, and Ann a really noble-minded man for a husband."

"It is Ann, then, who is to make the sweetest wife in the world? If so, Percy, how is it you have never thought of wishing for yourself the sweetest wife in the world?"

"Because I never have, is the only answer I can find. But about Ann and Malcolm—do you think he would have a chance of winning Ann?"

"No, no, no—Ann is not for Mr. Malcolm. That would not do at all. I doubt," —and Bruna looked fixedly at Percy—"if Ann has a heart to be won."

There was not the slightest shade of consciousness of what Bruna implied in Percy's face, as he answered—

"You mean that Ann is too generally loving to 'fall in love'?"

"I mean that—or something else. As to Mr. Malcolm, he is more likely to fall in love with me than with Ann. He is not a

good enough man to feel the sort of love with which Ann should be loved; he is more likely to fall a victim to a passion of which neither his conscience nor his judgment approve."

"You have formed the most monstrously mistaken idea of Malcolm, Bruna. He is a true and loyal gentleman. In you he would always see the promised wife of his friend."

"I would give little for Mr. Malcolm's truth, loyalty, gentlemanhood, or friendship, if—however, I didn't come here to torment you, poor prisoner, by railing at your friend."

"It is so strange, Bruna, that you, who have no experience of 'this wicked world,' as some people love to call it, should always take a black view of human nature."

"Is it strange? Is it not my 'low desire not to seem lowest makes me level all?' While with you, and with Ann," she added, her voice taking a tender tone, "it is just the opposite way; you are both so good,

and yet so humble-minded, that you are forced to exalt the world to avoid self-exaltation. You see, I have two saints in my shrine; there are two exceptions to my evil judgments." She rose as she spoke, and said, "Good night." He stretched his hand towards her. She hesitated a moment, then said, "I am generous, as you are lame," went to his side, stooped over him, and kissed him.

"I think, Bruna, I shall be tempted to set up a permanent lameness. You have been so good to me to-day, dear."

"Even if your lameness were permanent, my 'goodness' would not endure long, my poor boy."

Ann, finding herself alone with Mr. Malcolm, said, very timidly, "I want you to forgive me for making a request, Mr. Malcolm." Here she paused; he stooped his tall head towards her in a listening attitude of respectful attention, his unkempt-looking red locks falling forward

over his rough-hewn forehead as he did so. "It seems presumptuous of me to ask what I want to ask—It is, that you will not, wishing to set things right, interfere, I mean—I don't mean interfere in any evil sense—how stupid I am! What I am afraid is, that you will, naturally, being Percy's friend, often be pained by the way in which Bruna seems to treat him, and may try to improve their position towards each other. I wanted to ask you not to do this. Nobody, I am quite sure, can do any good. Bruna is very peculiar—she always does herself immense injustice. All the circumstances of her life have been most unhappy, and she is unhappy; but she is very noble. Of her own self she will come right, and do right. She needs that we should all be very patient with her."

Mr. Malcolm's face was admiringly affectionate as he looked down upon the little lady who, with such difficulty, had spoken so frankly. He did not immediately answer

her; when he did, it was with a question.

"If I saw my friend about to commit suicide, you would hardly require me to refrain from trying to save him? I won't deny that I regard his marriage with a woman of Miss D'Almeida's type, who does not love him, as the worst kind of moral suicide, and that I would do anything in my power to free him from his engagement."

Ann grew indignant.

"Is it not a little presumptuous of you, Mr. Malcolm, knowing so little, to pronounce so strongly? And, indeed, you are utterly mistaken. Percy's life is altogether set upon Bruna. He may not have an altogether happy life when he is married to her, but he would have an altogether unhappy life—hardly life at all—if he lost her."

"For six months, perhaps; and then he would be ready to make some wiser, happier, fitter choice, of some woman who could

love him, as Miss D'Almeida has not the grace even to pretend she does."

"How hardly, how unjustly you speak of Bruna! What has she done that should make you so bitter, Mr. Malcolm?"

"She seems to me to have spoiled the life of my one friend. She has possessed herself of him, and she treats him like a dog, with ill-concealed contempt. I don't mean to say Miss D'Almeida may not have some noble qualities. I don't mean to say she would necessarily be the curse of any man's life, but she is of his; and I am stung to see the absence of even pretence that she loves him."

"Bruna pretends nothing—except sometimes not to feel when she does feel, and to be less good than she really is."

"As odious a pretence as any other."

It was Bruna's voice that answered.

"In that I quite agree with you, Mr. Malcolm."

A few minutes after she and Ann bade

him good night, and went away. Bruna easily learnt from Ann all that had passed.

"Don't trouble your heart or head about me, my little darling," she said. "Percy's friend can do me no harm with Percy, and he will do Percy no harm with me that I do not choose to have done." She added, "Perhaps Mr. Malcolm thinks, or soon will think, that I am more fit for him than for Percy—that he could control and tame me. Perhaps he could."

The smile with which she ended made Ann say,

"You must not let yourself dislike him so very much, Bruna. He is unjust to you; but I do believe he loves Percy devotedly."

"Perhaps we may see his devotion prove itself," answered Bruna. "There are many things a man may do for his friend."

CHAPTER VIII.

LAYING SIEGE.

THE injury to Percy's foot proved to be of a tedious nature. It was some considerable time before he could either walk, or bear the stress of the stirrup in riding and all this time the girls rode daily under Mr. Malcolm's escort.

Those rides grew longer and longer, and Ann returned from them more and more pale and wearied-looking. Ann's heart was much with the poor prisoner at home; but as neither his friend nor his mistress appeared to bear him in mind, Ann shrank from the reproach to them of speaking of his loneliness. If she had thought about

Percy less Ann would have felt freer to speak of him. Perhaps this sense of Percy's loneliness was not the only thing that made Ann feel the long rides irksome. To Bruna they seemed anything but irksome; to her they were thorough and welcome exercise of mind and body. Her intercourse with Mr. Malcolm was all strife and conflict; she talked to him to have what she said contradicted or ridiculed, she listened to him to treat what he said in the same fashion.

If there could be such a thing as the attraction of repulsion, that phrase would best describe the feeling existing between Bruna and Mr. Malcolm. They were as quick in understanding each other as if there had been perfect sympathy between them; but they only understood to condemn, dislike, disapprove.

To Ann there was something peculiarly, and beyond what she could understand, painful in the whole tone of their treatment of each other. It sometimes seemed to her to be

Bruna, and sometimes Mr. Malcolm, who was the more to blame. With Mr. Malcolm she often felt angry; with Bruna wounded and grieved. At last, altogether over-done, and having taken cold, Ann was for a few days quite ill and unable to leave the house. Bruna did not give up her rides; the first she took alone with Mr. Malcolm was even longer than their other rides had been. She would not notice the reproving gravity of Ann's face when she came back.

When, next day, she was ready to start, and went to bid Ann good-bye, Ann asked her if she should be out long. Bruna answered, "Yes;" adding, "there are a few expeditions quite beyond your distance, Ann, to places Mr. Malcolm ought to see. If the weather is tolerable, we propose to make these while you are laid up. To-day we mean to ride to St. Kilva's Point; you know that is a long way."

"It is a very long way," Ann assented, gravely.

"I see by your face, Ann, you are wanting to say something. Speak out, dear child."

"Well, Bruna, do you think it is quite the right thing; that it looks nice—that Percy will like it?"

"Will like what?"

"These very long rides, while neither of us go with you."

"Percy ought to be, and, no doubt, is very much obliged to me for devoting myself to his friend's amusement," was Bruna's careless answer.

A careless answer, but spoken with a look that silenced Ann. Bruna lingered a few minutes by Ann. Presently she said, kissing her—

"Don't fret about me, darling. I know what I am doing, and I am doing nothing of which I am ashamed, or for which I shall be sorry." Having said that, she went.

A few days later Ann and Percy were together in the drawing-room, when the

two riders, coming home, passed one of the windows. Percy had been limping up and down the room a little, leaning on Ann's arm, and they were then standing together in that window.

"How brilliant Bruna looks!" said Percy. "I can't say the same of Malcolm; evidently they have been quarrelling, and Bruna has had the best of it. What a world of good it has done Bruna, the poor darling, to be amused and interested as Malcolm is able to amuse and interest her. The change in her since he came tells volumes as to the trial to her of our quiet life, Ann."

"But, Percy, Bruna does not like Mr. Malcolm. Indeed, I am sure she dislikes him very deeply. Isn't it strange that people who certainly dislike each other should still seem to like to be so much together?"

"They cannot help admiring each other, Ann. At least, I am sure that Malcolm cannot help admiring Bruna; and she, even

if on the whole she does not like him, must admire some of his qualities." And here Percy sighed, and that sigh was echoed in Ann's heart.

"How sad and solemn you two are looking!" cried Bruna, putting her plumed hat inside the door. "We have had such a glorious splatter-dash ride in the wind and the rain. I can't come in, I'm too heavily-weighted with mud. I'm glad to see you downstairs once more, dear Percy!"

Before he could answer her or reach her she was gone.

Bruna's brilliant spirits certainly did not seem to be shared by the companion of her ride. Mr. Malcolm looked savage and preoccupied; he did not come in, but just showed himself at the window, answering shortly and irritably the words spoken to him by Percy. Soon afterwards they saw him at a distance, striding across the park, pipe in mouth.

About a week after this, when Percy was

able to get about unaided, with only a slight limp, there was a dinner-party at Beech-holmes. On this day Bruna and Mr. Malcolm had ridden alone as usual. They came home so late that, though Bruna dressed hastily, and Ann had taken care that everything was ready for her, all the guests had been for some time assembled when Bruna entered the drawing-room. She entered as a queen might enter to her assembled court, as entirely free from any sign of haste, or any consciousness that in anything she had offended. To-day Bruna had discarded the simplicity, almost poverty, of costume she had lately affected. For a young woman, and for a lady in her own house, her dress was to-day too magnificently costly. She wore the velvet dress which had been the subject of consultation between herself and Ann a few weeks ago. In colour it was of the darkest shade of damask in a damask rose, dazzlingly setting off the most exquisite soft whiteness of her neck and arms. In

her masses of black hair, and in her bosom, she had clusters of the white, waxen-textured, heavy-perfumed stephanotis, which was no whiter, though of a less warm and lovely whiteness, than her own. On her cheek was the rich glow left by the exercise of the recent rapid ride. Her eyes had a crystal clearness, and looked as if they remembered the beauty they had lately seen reflected in the mirror.

Old Mr. Travers, who, watch in hand, had meant to greet her with some stinging sneer, slunk out of her way abashed. Percy was waiting to give her his arm. On his arm she made the circuit of the room with a superb sort of grace, finding some fit word to say to each person, reading in all eyes an acknowledgment of her—to-night—unparalleled beauty. Neither Percy nor any other had ever seen Bruna so beautiful as she looked to-night. There was something new in her expression and manner. Bruna was just now living under intense, though

suppressed excitement. For the first time she felt keenly and buoyantly alive. For the first time she had set herself a task, and was fully roused to do it. To her present phase of comprehension it was not an ignoble task, nor a contemptible excitement. If what she was going to do was evil, of it great good was to come. Of this no doubt had yet crossed her mind.

Percy wished his friend to take Bruna in to dinner. When the two stopped in front of Mr. Malcolm, Percy's radiant face challenged his friend's admiration for Bruna. Mr. Malcolm would not meet Percy's look, and his expression, as he offered his arm to Bruna, did not show much appreciation of the honour done to him.

"You look more fit for lion-killing than for taking a lady to a dinner-table," said Bruna, laughingly. "What has happened to annoy you?" she asked. "If there is some lady in the room—Ann, for instance —you would have preferred as your com-

panion, it is not too late. I will call Percy and tell him so—shall I?"

"No." That one monosyllable was all his answer.

"He had some idea, poor simple fellow, that you would be flattered by having me committed to your charge, and also that I should have a companion who would not bore me."

Presently, as she seated herself at the table, she turned a questioning look upon his face.

"Beauty enough to drive a man mad," he muttered; adding, "emphatically '*beauté du diable.*'"

"What polite malediction is that?"

"I was answering the question of your eyes and of Percy's."

"Did they ask the same question?"

"And made the same assertion."

"And yours was an affirmative answer?"

To this he did not reply, unless by savagely tugging at his red beard. For some

time they were the most silent pair at the table; then, quite abruptly, Bruna said,

"You have a strange idea of the duties of friendship, Mr. Malcolm."

"How do you mean, Miss D'Almeida?" turning on her with a ferocity that attracted the notice of Ann, who sat opposite. (It was a round table, with no special seat reserved for host or hostess.)

"I only meant—you needn't look at me as if you wished I were a man, that you might knock me down—I only meant that I'm sure Percy intended I should be amused, and that I do not find you amusing."

"Perhaps we have had too much of each other's company to be any longer amusing one to the other. I begin to think I may have had too much of yours."

She looked at him.

"Indeed, Mr. Malcolm, I am not 'a creature of infinite variety,' I know, but I am not so very monotonous, am I?"

"I think you know what I mean." And

there was a fiery glow in the red chestnut eyes, from which she inwardly shrank. Outwardly there was no sign of consciousness; she answered carelessly—

"Know what you mean, Mr. Malcolm! —not I; but I don't care to know, though I certainly have wondered a little of what you have been thinking while you have sat beside me gloomy and silent."

"I have been thinking of a most unprofitable subject—of Miss D'Almeida's beauty."

There was something aggressive, almost insolent, in the tone in which this was said. Bruna's was a nature to resent this keenly, but she had her own reasons for not now showing resentment. Her colour heightened, but she took no other notice than to say, quietly and coldly,

"Speaking of beauty, how lovely Ann is looking to-night!"

"Miss Travers is always lovely. There's a strong likeness, as between brother and sister, between her and my friend Percy.

Percy's face always reminds me of that description of Sir Galahad, which says he was 'seemly and demure as a dove, with all manner of good features.'"

"Ann has said the same," answered Bruna; adding, "In these days we should call that an effeminate-sounding eulogy—a more fit description of a maiden than of a knight."

"But in those days, Miss D'Almeida, when men could so easily prove their rough-and-ready manliness, gentleness and beauty were not, in a young man, considered matter for scorn and reproach. That has always seemed to me a most fit description for a maiden knight."

"Are gentleness and beauty now considered, in a young man, matter for scorn and reproach?" asked Bruna, innocently; adding, "If so, how very free from reproach Mr. Malcolm must be!"

"I think Travers has cause to pronounce that Miss D'Almeida so considers them."

"I suppose it must be the great contrast between you and Percy that has chiefly endeared you to each other."

"I understand the sneer, Miss D'Almeida."

"I wonder," she went on, "what, besides the contrast between you, has made you love Percy as you have several times boasted that you do love him. I should like to learn the secret."

"It would be no use to you. A man's love for his friend is too reasonable and too unselfish a love for a woman to be able to understand it."

"A woman's love for a man, then, Mr. Malcolm, you think can be neither unselfish nor reasonable?"

"I do think such is the rule, and that the exceptions are most rare. In this presence," looking across at Ann, "I should be sorry to say there are no exceptions."

"And how do you pronounce of a man's

love for a woman? Is that never unselfish or reasonable?"

"It is sometimes unselfish, but never reasonable."

"Not even Percy's for me?" asked Bruna, mischievously.

"Certainly, and most emphatically, not Percy's for you."

Then, wishing to change the kind of conversation, Bruna asked,

"What is it they are talking of across the table, Mr. Malcolm? Do you catch what it is that Ann is saying?" They both listened a few moments, then Bruna said, "I know—they are speaking of modern novels, and of the absurdly-exaggerated way in which most of them speak of the position, the influence, and the character of women."

"Because so large a proportion of modern novels are written by women."

"I knew you would say that, Mr. Malcolm. I should have been quite disappointed if you had not said it. If you

should ever write a novel, Mr. Malcolm, there will, at all events, be in it plenty of masculine self-exaltation."

"I hardly know that, Miss D'Almeida. Masculine superiority is a well-established and proved fact, that needs no noise should be made about it. It is the weakness of the women's cause that makes them raise such a clamour."

"How well Miss Travers always talks when she is drawn on to talk," he presently remarked. "Her talk is model woman's talk; her words are as fit as they are few."

"And her thoughts are always as fair as they are true," agreed Bruna. "Ann is not at all clever, but she is ever so wise."

"That strikes me as a most just observation."

"We agree so well, Mr. Malcolm, when we talk of Ann, that I am sure you must begin to think of changing your opinion of her."

"Or of another lady."

"One may live beside the violet, and catch nothing of its sweetness. The nettle often does."

"I can imagine that Miss D'Almeida, when and for whom she pleases, would have a powerful and peculiar sweetness all her own."

"Like that of this stephanotis, for instance."

"As intoxicating."

Bruna, having met the look with which that was said, talked no more to Mr. Malcolm. She was either satisfied or disgusted by what she had seen in his eyes—possibly she was both. At all events, for the remainder of the time she sat at table, she bestowed her attention upon her neighbour on her other hand.

Mr. Malcolm's face resumed its gloom. He ate and drank, and was silent. He was engaged in trying to prove to himself that things were not with him as they were. To any man in his sober senses, and worthy

the name of man—that is to say, to any man past the first folly of youth, the beauty of a woman should be no more than the beauty of a flower, a bird, a butterfly, thought Mr. Malcolm—should have no more power to move him. His eyes should be able to gaze at it as freely, and his heart to be as untroubled by this gaze—as was his when he looked at—Ann.

Mr. Malcolm was among the last to leave the dining-room. Conscious of a restless desire to be again in Miss D'Almeida's presence, he remained where he was till the old butler gave unmistakeable signs of wishing to clear away both Mr. Travers and the decanters.

As he crossed the hall, half intending, with only his pipe as companion, to go into the park, he was drawn, instead, into the drawing-room by the rich music of a finely-mellow contralto voice; whose voice, he did not for a moment doubt, though he had not before heard Bruna sing. The cultiva-

tion of this voice had been the one earnest occupation of Bruna's life; but her lessons had chiefly been taken in town, and her practice was always in her own room, with doors carefully closed and curtained. Percy had a strong feeling against the display of her dangerously rich gift, and she herself considered her peculiarly dramatic style out of taste in a drawing-room. Yet now, this evening, she was pouring out a passionate Italian love-song.

Mr. Malcolm withdrew into a window and listened. As he listened, he breathed the intoxicating southern fragrance of orange-flowers from the conservatory. He was startled, as by a sudden revelation of possibilities of which he had not even dreamt. Of how such a woman would love—of what it might be to be loved by such a woman—he found himself thinking. As he withdrew his eyes from the face of the singer, the irradiated face—Bruna could do nothing by halves, and, singing, threw all her soul

into her song—they rested on Percy. Percy looked pale and pained and cold.

For the first time it struck Mr. Malcolm that Percy's delicate face and slight boyish figure suggested want of substance, of character, of richness, and of colour—that there was something thin, poor, limited, insufficient about him—that it was difficult to imagine his nature one that could satisfy the woman who was singing with such power and passion. Possibly, after all, if Miss D'Almeida did not love Travers as Travers deserved to be loved, it might not be wholly Miss D'Almeida's fault, but her and his misfortune. Thinking this of Percy, their eyes met. Pity softened Malcolm's: an expression he did not understand was in Percy's. Some one came between them; Malcolm lost sight of Percy, and was plunged again into the atmosphere of Bruna's singing. Before he recognised that the singing had ceased (so much it sang on within him), it had ceased, and the singer stood beside him.

"Have you been listening to that folly, Mr. Malcolm?" she asked.

"Glorious madness, rather than folly," he answered her, and moved away, passing through the conservatory out into the cool night air.

"This won't do—this won't do—this won't do!" was all he, for a long time, found to say to himself. By-and-by he added—"I'd go to-morrow, but that I know she'd read the reason of it, and would triumph over me. The insolent witch! I must stay and conquer—must conquer her and myself."

The smile of triumph with which the "insolent witch" looked after him soon died upon her lips. With a sinking heart and a bitter pang, she asked herself—"And what after?"

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT WAS SAID ON A BALCONY.

LATE that night, Mr. Malcolm and Percy sat talking and smoking on the balcony outside Mr. Malcolm's window. The night was very calm and still, and they were both glad of its cool freshness. By-and-by Percy, *àpropos* of nothing, merely because, boy-like, to his own familiar friend he was unable to keep silent as to what filled all his thoughts, began to speak of Bruna—of how splendid, how magnificent, how queenly she had looked that evening. It seemed to him curiously churlish and grudging of his friend that, not being able to find any fault with Bruna's appearance, he should begin

to speak depreciatingly of her manner. "It is nothing like so good as that of Miss Travers. Miss Travers, with her sweet quiet courtesy, which one feels is just the natural outcome of her sweet quiet self, is ever so far nearer my notion of the ideal lady. It is easy to see that neither in society nor in family life is she occupied with herself, but always with others. In Miss Travers the utter simplicity of goodness results in a sweeter version of the same thing that makes an accomplished *dame de société* fascinatingly irresistible."

To Percy this praise of "sweet sister Ann" seemed so exaggeratedly high-flown that he could not help feeling that it was spoken either in spite against Bruna, or from love of Ann.

Mr. Malcolm finished by giving a stab keener than he knew, saying,

"Miss D'Almeida may be considered queenly by those whose notion of queenliness is the popular one derived from the

stage." He added, not to Percy, but to himself, "What a grand Lady Macbeth she would make! A woman of whom one involuntarily thinks that she must be a most 'uncomfortable' person in domestic life."

Percy, after some moments of silence, said, in a pained voice,

"It is not fair to draw comparisons between Ann and Bruna. All the circumstances of Ann's life have always been so much happier, so much more favourable to the development of such ordinary virtues as amiability and gentleness. Ann has not had to encounter dislike and opposition from her very childhood. Ann has not had to feel herself dependent, and to have that dependence embittered by insult."

"I don't think Miss Travers is made of stuff which any circumstances would have spoiled."

"Your admiration of Ann, however warm, need not make you unjustly harsh to Bruna"

Mr. Malcolm puffed away fiercely in silence after that, till, to Percy's next remark, "Ann's position is entirely independent; when she marries she will have only herself to please," he growled savagely, "That's nothing to me," in a tone that made the sentence sound incomplete unfinished by the words, "You fool!"

A moment after he blurted out the abrupt question,

"Travers, when do you expect to marry Miss D'Almeida?"

"I wish I could tell you, Malcolm. I can only answer, as soon as she will let me."

"I suppose you know she doesn't love you? You can't be so blind as not to know that. There is more love for you in Ann Travers's little finger than in Miss D'Almeida's whole heart."

The manner in which this was said made the matter as offensive as possible; but Percy, who had his own theory as to the reason

of his friend's peculiar savagery, answered with gentle patience,

"You don't understand. It is quite different. There is no comparison to be drawn. Ann and I have always loved each other dearly, as brother and sister. As to Bruna, you should not pronounce such rash judgments. It is not likely you should comprehend her. For my own part, I am content to wait. If, lately, I have too much hurried her, it has been because she is not happy here." He added in a lower voice, "I am more than content to wait. She has lately been wonderfully kind and loving to me."

"You poor boy!" broke from Mr. Malcolm. "Kind and loving! She has been just civilly tolerant at the best, sometimes not even that."

"Malcolm! Even you may go too far."

Without heeding, or showing that he had heard that warning, Mr. Malcolm went on to say,

"As I listened to-night to Miss D'Almeida's singing, there came to me a sort of revelation of how such a woman would love, if she loved." A pause, then, in a very different tone, he added, "Pshaw! What do I know, or wish to know, of women or love? As to her singing, Miss D'Almeida's a born actress, and in such it may mean nothing—may be simply dramatic." Again Percy had received a stab. He gave no sign, all his wincing was inward, and Malcolm went on: "It seems to me, Travers, that if you are still bent on marrying Miss D'Almeida, if nothing in her treatment of you can warn you against wishing to do so, you should go quite a different way to work. You are gentle, submissive, tolerant, beyond what is manly. Perhaps a woman is not wholly to be blamed when she rewards unmanly submission with unwomanly contempt."

"The position is a peculiar one, Malcolm."

"I know it is; you should make her know it. At present she takes advantage of it, without recognising that she does so. I don't think Miss D'Almeida is wholly without generosity; and I think that if you forced her to realize your position—how you feel bound to endure from her slighting behaviour and evil treatment beyond what, to my notion, any man should endure from any woman, because of the utter forlornness of her fate, her poverty, beggary, helplessness, if you were to break with her—I think, I say, that she is not so wholly without generosity but that, if this were once properly brought before her, she would decide upon her course of action, would not drag out the slow length of your agony, but would, at once, either free you or marry you."

"But, Malcolm, what a fool you are not to see that it is just to this I do not wish to drive her! What you speak of 'putting properly before her,' is just the thing

to which, if I could, I would have her for ever blind! You speak of her freeing me. You think only of me, but I have to think of her. Let us for a moment suppose what, heaven knows, my heart cannot endure to contemplate even for a moment, that all is over between us—our engagement ended, she free, I free—what is to become of my poor darling? You know enough of the feeling between her and my father, to know it is not there she could find refuge. I say, what is to become of Bruna?"

Mr. Malcolm did not immediately answer; when he did, what he said was rather evasion than answer.

"You conclude that I speak only in your interest; but is not the present position of things degrading, humiliating to Miss D'Almeida?"

"No, unless some coarse speaking made her recognise what she does not now recognise."

"Marrying you, not loving you, does she not sell herself to escape beggary."

"I don't see, Malcolm," Percy answered, speaking hoarsely, "why you should so entirely take for granted that Bruna does not, will not, love me."

"Possibly I am mistaken, Travers, and she does love you. If so, it is in the manner such a woman would love a faithful dog; and, heaven knows, I'd rather be hated, shot, by a woman I loved, than loved in that fashion. My blood boils for you, as it seems yours is not hot enough to do for yourself!"

"You look at everything that concerns Bruna with prejudiced eyes, Malcolm. You iudge her, and misjudge her. The less said of her between us the better for our friendship. If she cannot love me she will not marry me. I love her, and am content to wait."

"So wasting vainly the very best years of your life! Surely, Travers, you would be man enough to conquer this love for a

woman who does not love you, were it not for the fixed idea in your mind that for her the only alternative is—you for a husband, or beggary?"

"The alternative she proposes to herself, if she does not marry me, is to go upon the stage!"

"She might do worse! But surely there is another possibility—that you may not always be for her the one man and possible husband of the world. She must know that, in such a matter, the world is pretty much open to her, all before her, where to choose."

"She does not believe that. Either there is, or she has been made to believe there is, something doubtful in the circumstances of her birth. Malcolm, if you knew all, your heart is a crueller heart than I can imagine, if you would not be more lenient in your judgment of my poor darling!"

On that silence followed, broken presently by Mr. Malcolm's saying, in a changed voice,

"But, Travers, can't you comprehend that

even that alternative of going on the stage, of which you speak and think as if it were the climax of horror, might be, for a woman so powerful and so gifted, a happier, ay, and even a better way than a loveless marriage?"

To Percy's low-spoken protest—"Why always take for granted that marriage with me would necessarily be loveless?" Mr. Malcolm paid no heed, but went on—

"She is, as I before said, and I say it now in no depreciatory spirit, a born actress. She is gloriously gifted for the stage, and the nearest approach to happiness any of us ever know is the exercise of any function for which we are peculiarly adapted. I would say, let her exercise her gifts—let her go upon the stage, rather than marry where she does not love."

"It is easy to see that you have never loved a woman!"

"Percy, old fellow, dear old fellow, not that cold tone. Forgive me if I have pressed you over-hard. I cannot, I own, help

wishing to play Providence in your life—to take out of yours a hand unworthy, from its want of love, to lie in it, and to put in it another. But, there—I've done."

And of that talk this was really the end, for they now parted.

CHAPTER X.

SKIRMISHING.

THE next morning Percy rode, for the first time since his accident—Ann, for the first time since her indisposition. The other two rode also, of course. They were therefore a quartette. The order of their going for the first half-hour was Mr. Malcolm and Ann riding on in front, Bruna following with Percy. During this half-hour Percy found Bruna profoundly pre-occupied. When he spoke to her she often did not hear him; if she answered him it was at cross-purposes. The wind, she declared, blew his voice from her.

"I wonder what Ann and Mr. Malcolm

are speaking about?" she by-and-by said, in a musing, speculative tone. "They seem so very much in earnest. Percy, I feel as if I must know what it is they are talking about."

"Why should you to-day be so particularly inquisitive? They are capital friends; they generally find plenty to talk about. Malcolm expresses more admiration for Ann than I ever before heard him express for any woman."

"Then, Percy, I should say there is some other woman for whom Mr. Malcolm feels an admiration he does not express. Percy, don't trust your friend, he's a traitor!"

"I do trust him, Bruna. I believe him to be absolutely trustworthy."

"He's a traitor, Percy!"

"Why should you say so, Bruna?"

"Because I think so."

"Why should you think so?"

"Because I *know* so. He's a traitor, Percy!—he's a traitor!"

"You are unreasonably prejudiced against poor Malcolm. It is very strange you two should so dislike each other."

"Are you sure we do 'so dislike each other'?"

"It seems to me there's plenty of evidence to that effect."

"But one of us is a traitor, Percy."

"You seem to find strange pleasure, Bruna, in repeating what you know it must be very painful to me to hear."

"I will repeat it no more; but the day will come when you will know which of us two judged your friend the more justly. Meanwhile, I should like to hear you tell him what it is I say of him."

"Indeed I will not. Why would you have me insult my guest?"

"If you will not, Percy, then I will."

Not waiting for the remonstrance she knew would come, she sharply touched her horse, which, bounding forward, soon brought her to Mr. Malcolm's side.

"Mr. Malcolm," she immediately began, "I do nothing in the dark, so I wish to tell you what it is I have just been saying about you to Percy."

She had to pause a moment to take breath. Mr. Malcolm turned an amazed face towards her.

"Well, Miss D'Almeida? I am all attention."

"I have been telling Percy that his friend is a traitor, and that the day will come when he will only too fully feel the justice of my accusation."

"This is a jest, I suppose, Miss D'Almeida?" There was a curious glow in the red depths of Mr. Malcolm's chestnut eyes.

"Jest or earnest, as you like to take it," was the careless answer.

"I have no choice of how to take it. As the words are spoken by a woman, I must receive them as spoken in jest. The jest is, it seems to me, in curiously bad taste."

"If the words had not been spoken by a woman?"

"They would have been answered as earnest."

"How?"

"By a few blows from this," shaking a heavy hunting-whip, "across the shoulders of the speaker.—Our conversation is not to Miss Travers's liking," Mr. Malcolm then remarked. He added, laughing, "Your sudden attack was as unexpected as the falling of a thunder-bolt out of a clear Summer sky—a most startling interruption of the very pleasant chat I was having with Miss Travers."

"I can easily show you that it was not as unprovoked as you think."

At this moment Percy joined them.

"Ride on with me, Mr. Malcolm, I have something to say to you." Bruna spoke in a voice of command, so directing her face that the words reached Mr. Malcolm only.

"But, Miss D'Almeida, I, being in a

peaceful mood this morning, and disinclined for war, am disposed to prefer the society of Miss Travers."

"Miss Travers, however, is not disposed to prefer the society of Mr. Malcolm—now, or at any time."

Ann had already dropped behind, and Percy had fallen back to her side.

"Of that I am quite aware, Miss D'Almeida."

"And I am quite aware that you are aware of it, Mr. Malcolm."

"You have sufficient penetration to discover that I am not without it."

"I have not, in this matter, been left to the guidance of my own penetration, Mr. Malcolm."

"No? I don't remember that the subject has been discussed between us."

"I don't remember that it has."

Then there was a short silence. Bruna could not exactly make up her mind how to begin what she meant to say. Mr.

Malcolm, after assuring himself, by a glance over his shoulder, that Percy was not within hearing, said abruptly, and, apparently, *apropos* of nothing,

"Travers is looking very harassed and ill. Don't you think so, Miss D'Almeida?"

To annoy her companion, Bruna assumed a carelessness she did not feel.

"I haven't thought about it," she answered. "I don't suppose he is the better for his long imprisonment, and the pain he has suffered."

"Mere physical pain wouldn't have made the change in him that I find."

"Even Percy, I suppose, Mr. Malcolm, must have some small share of the troubles and perplexities of life; even Percy can't be always a baby, a boy. I daresay you wish me to understand that I am the harassing thorn in his flesh. Probably you are right. But if it were not for this thorn, wouldn't he be too intolerably content?"

"I can't see what there is, beyond his

own beautiful and lovable disposition, to make him so. A fair fortune and fine estate are good things, but, on the whole, I am very far from envying my poor young friend."

"On the contrary," said Bruna, looking straight before her, keeping her face as expressionless as possible, but speaking with great distinctness, "you see so much to pity, so much you would like to remedy in the life of your 'poor young friend,' that you cannot help wishing to play Providence in that life—to take out of Percy's a hand unworthy, from its want of love, to lie in it (mine to wit), and to put in it another you count to be loving and worthy (Ann's to wit)."

She could not resist a glance at Mr. Malcolm as she finished speaking. The look that met hers was so little short of furious, that she was for the moment checked, startled—only for the moment; and she gave no outward sign of flinching.

"Eaves-dropper!—traitress!" were words that broke from Mr. Malcolm.

"Hardly that, Mr. Malcolm. I sat at my open window, as I often do—you chose to talk upon a balcony—the night was silent and still. I am not penitent that I did not withdraw, or give any warning of my neighbourhood. I should greatly regret not to have heard what I heard; just as I should greatly regret not to have read a certain letter I read some weeks ago. I do not exactly understand why you should have tried so hard to draw from Percy the confession that, but for my beggary if he freed me, he would not try to hold me to my engagement; but I cannot expect to understand all the ins and outs of a diplomatic mind. And what I did understand of what I heard was instructive—in many ways instructive. It has enabled me to confirm myself in a resolution which you, Mr. Malcolm, must help me—at least with advice—to carry out."

Mr. Malcolm made her no answer; he was trying to recall what had passed between himself and Percy, what he had said, exactly what it was she had overheard.

Bruna went on—"By what right you assume to know, what you so confidently assured Percy, that I do not love him, or only as I might love a faithful dog, I cannot tell." Then, suddenly, her tone lost all asperity, grew gentle, dreamy, melancholy. "If I do not love Percy," she said, "I do not know that I do not; but if I do not, it must be because he loves me, because I cannot help scorning him for loving me, in whom, beyond my beauty, is nothing to love. It often seems to me that it would be less degrading to be wooed—as an ugly heiress might be—for money, than be loved for mere beauty of flesh and blood. What I would choose, if I could choose, would be to be just like Ann—just like Ann, who is lovely, because her mind is lovely and there is nothing in her face to misrepresent

it, who is most lovely in the home quiet, and for those who most love her. Yes, I would be like dear, good, sweet Ann."

He gave her a sidelong look, trying to detect the mockery in which, he thought, she spoke; but her face was more tender and more grave than he had ever seen it; if he had seen her eyes he would have seen them moist with feeling.

"I daresay," she went on in the same tone, "that you think what I am saying purely 'dramatic,' that you consider me altogether triumphantly bad as well as beautiful——"

"'Bad' is a rough, coarse word," he interrupted. "And it is difficult to know what opportunities Miss D'Almeida can have had——"

"Of doing more," she broke in, "than indulging bad passions. But that, Mr. Malcolm, I sometimes think, is the most hopeless state of all. It seems to me it must be much easier for practical than for

theoretical sinners to enter upon the way of repentance. The latter can persuade themselves they stand in no need to repent. The former can hardly so deceive themselves. For the same reason I could feel more hopeful for a great criminal than for a small sinner."

"What do you mean, Miss D'Almeida?"

"I mean, Mr. Malcolm, that if you or I, for instance, had committed a treacherous act, we should be startled awake to the consciousness of the treachery of our hearts, and might be stimulated by shame to repentance; but while our traitorousness is a secret thing, known only to our own hearts, and having borne no fruit, it is easy to deceive ourselves concerning it, to hold that it is not what it is—even to give it some fine name—call it something admirable."

He turned on her quickly; but she, looking straight before her, did not meet his look. He said,

"You think, then, that hidden fire had

always better be allowed to break into flame?"

"Of course. It is, so, more likely to be quenched," she answered.

"Ah! but it may rage furiously, unquenched, and work destruction."

"Destruction is better than corruption," was her quick reply.

There was a pause. Mr. Malcolm, this morning, was puzzled exceedingly by his companion. He was conscious of some difference in her from anything he had noticed in her before; there was less mockery, more earnestness. She was driving at something, he was sure, in all she said, but he could not imagine at what, and her face had a set and resolute expression.

"Not prevention, but cure, then, Miss D'Almeida, would seem to be your creed," he said. "If a man is inclined to theft, you would have him rob, that he may know himself to be a thief. If he is violent, you would have him murder, that he may know

himself to be a murderer. If he is disposed to love his neighbour's wife, or his friend's bride, you would have him, if he can, rob his neighbour or his friend of wife or bride, that he may know himself to be a villain. In short, you would have us all yield to our evil inclinations, that, by some definite ill-deed, we may be humiliated and startled to repentance."

"I don't say that, Mr. Malcolm, because I understand enough of social economy to know that we are obliged to consider society as well as the individual. We have to think of the robbed, the murdered, the betrayed, as well as of the robber, murderer, betrayer. It is all a curious coil. I don't know—you don't know—none of us know anything about it."

"There is some dim remembrance in my mind, Miss D'Almeida, of some exhortation to resist the Devil and he will flee from us—to wrestle with and conquer temptation."

She took no notice of that, but, presently, began again—

"I have been pondering much concerning what I overhead last night, Mr. Malcolm. It seems to me that I have a right to demand some advice from you. You consider me the bane of your friend's life, the cause of the waste of his best years; what course do you counsel me to take? How am I to free Percy's life from its bane, and to end its waste?"

No answer.

"You are convinced," she went on, "that but for pity for my fate if he let me go free, Percy, though he loves me, would not wish to marry me, would not try to hold me to my engagement. You are convinced that, freed from me, a happier life would open before Percy. What am I to do, Mr. Malcolm, to set him free? How am I to dispose of myself in any way that shall not half break his dear, kind heart, and Ann's, with grief and pity? It is not so easy, is it, Mr.

Malcolm, when it comes to the point, to say what is to be done, and how? It is a complicated question. It is no use for me to stab them through their tender hearts, and then say, I leave them to be happy."

Still no answer.

"I think I may conclude from your silence now, and from what I heard last night, that you, in spite of what you know of Percy's feeling on that subject, would counsel me to break free from Percy, and from all my life here, and to seek my fortune on the stage."

"Good heavens, no!" he broke out. "Don't for one moment think I counsel you to that. I, as a man, am aware of that of which you a woman, a mere girl, are ignorant, the sort of fortune alone to be won by such capital as yours."

"You seemed to have no thought of those things last night, Mr. Malcolm, when you spoke to Percy of my being 'a born actress, gloriously gifted,' and likely to find

happiness in 'the exercise of my peculiar function.' What you said then, though it seems you did not mean it, was reasonable and right;" and then Bruna's cheek suddenly flamed, and her eye flashed as she added, "Though I am but a woman, a mere girl, I could protect myself from such 'fortune' as I did not choose to encounter."

"So many a woman before you has thought—till the trial came."

She answered him nothing to that; but when she spoke again all her dreamy gentleness was gone, the mocking devil within her fully awake.

"You are ready enough to tell me what *not* to do," she said, "but as to what I am to do, you give me no counsel. I am not to marry Percy—for his sake. I am not to go upon the stage—for my own. What do you propose should become of me? You have boasted of the unselfish devotion of a man's love for a man, and especially of yours for Percy. Are you in any way pre-

pared to prove it? Is there anything you would sacrifice? Anything you will do to prove it? For instance, would you murder me?"

She saw the fiery glow that came into his eye, and she heard his answer before he spoke it.

"Murder you!" he echoed, "I would do worse than that—worse for you and worse for me—I would marry you."

His tone was grimly jocose.

"Do you mean it, I wonder?" she said.

"It is what you have been trying to drive me to say. And now, traitress that you are, you will doubtless go to Percy with triumphant proof of the treachery of his friend."

"Shall I? I think not," she said, gravely and deliberately. "Do you mean, Mr. Malcolm, that you would marry me?"

"You know I would," he answered fiercely; then added, "What more might a man do for his friend? Is not this to be ready,

in good sooth, to lay down one's life for one's friend?"

"That is as it may be," she answered; "it is not for me to discriminate motives."

"Don't you think I hate you for what you have driven me to say?"

"Any way, you have said it, and I will think the matter over. We must speak together again."

She was afraid lest he should read the expression of her eyes. In her heart there was such a mingling of mad triumph and of maddening repugnance to the way she was going, and the man with whom she had to do, that she was afraid of betraying herself. So she touched her horse, and flew on out of sight. The other two rode up to Malcolm. All three went softly on, and by-and-by, but not before Percy had begun to feel anxious, Bruna met them.

All that day Bruna's spirits seemed uncontrollably wild. Mr. Malcolm had a downcast, hang-dog look. To Percy he was fierce

and testy, and he watched Bruna with a look of irritation and suspicion. At dinner-time he spoke of his intention to leave Beechholmes within a day or two, and to start almost immediately on his African expedition.

"Shall we join him, Bruna?" asked Percy, with his smile, which was now often as sad as beautiful. "Lion-hunting in Africa might be exciting enough even for you!"

Here old Mr. Travers interposed, snarling out,

"I think you had better be left out of the arrangement, my boy. Stay comfortably at home with Ann and me, and send her to Africa with Malcolm."

"Send her to Africa, and may a lion gobble her up! You should not leave your sentence so woefully incomplete, sir," said Bruna. But as she spoke her eyes encountered Mr. Malcolm's, and they both suddenly flushed.

This was noted by the old man, and over

this he inwardly chuckled. Bruna seemed aware of that inward chuckle, for, as she laid a tired and painful head on her pillow that night, she said,

"If anything could make me now hesitate, it would be the pleasure I am preparing for that old reprobate!"

CHAPTER XI.

ANN'S JEALOUSY.

THE following day was very wet, too wet for either riding or walking. All that day Bruna and Mr. Malcolm were not five minutes alone together. Bruna's spirits seemed to have failed her. She spoke and moved as if under some heavy oppression, and in her eyes there was at times a look of alarm. It was about Mr. Malcolm that there was to-day a something of triumphant exultation, and a light that boded him no good would flash across Bruna's face when she noticed this.

On the second day there was no improve-

ment in the outward condition of things. After an unusually prolonged spell of fine Autumn weather, the season seemed to have broken up. On the evening of this day it chanced that Bruna was alone in the drawing-room, in the before-dinner twilight. Ann had been called away. Bruna sat thinking of Mr. Malcolm; not of Mr. Malcolm as a whole, as an individual, but of Mr. Malcolm as he affected herself. She was thinking of that new something in his face when he looked at her, in his voice when he spoke to her—was it passion or proprietorship?—which at once disgusted and frightened her, made her self-distrustful, irresolute, miserable. It raised in her the question whether, supposing she allowed herself to be in this man's power, she should be able to say to him "so far shall you go and no further," and be able to enforce his obedience to her command. She still believed that she should be able to do this; but in moments of depression, such as the present, she was

visited by deadly qualms, her heart died within her, and her purpose all but failed. This evening, alone in the grim dusk, everything looked dark to her, all ways were beset by terrors—till the spirit of combat was roused, as presently it was.

A touch on her shoulder, a hot breath felt upon her cheek, made her start up to draw back from and confront Mr. Malcolm, with the thought, "How dare the man come so near?" The tone in which she said his name expressed that question. Then she laughed a little laugh, at once bitter and nervous, and said,

"You startled me;" adding, "Not, however, that you were far from my thoughts."

"I wish to remind you, Miss D'Almeida, that we have much to say to each other—if anything."

"This is not the time or the place for saying it."

"I know that. It rests with you to make the time and place—to offer me the oppor-

tunity, of which I will not be slow to avail myself."

"There is no hurry, Mr. Malcolm," she said carelessly.

"In that you are mistaken, Miss D'Almeida. If there is anything to be said, to be arranged between us, it must be said and arranged at once, not later than to-morrow. I cannot, and I will not, wait upon your caprice. I am not Percy, your patient devotee. If you choose, however, to tell me there is nothing to be said, I accept your decision. I will leave Beech-holmes at once, and will soon forget how you have befooled me."

"You must not leave Beech-holmes till we have spoken together."

"Then our speaking together must be to-morrow."

"How can I promise that? I think Ann is not easy about us—she keeps so closely at my side."

"I know you have wit enough to arrange

an opportunity, if you choose to do so."

Bruna reflected a few moments.

"To-morrow is Ann's afternoon at her school," she said. "Weather does not keep Ann away from her school. To-morrow you were to go with Percy to lunch at The Towers. If you choose to let him go without you, indoors or out, we may find time for uninterrupted talk to-morrow."

"Good! Remember I hold you pledged to nothing. If, when to-morrow comes, you choose to say to me that there is nothing need be spoken of between us, as I said before, I accept your decision—only I shall accept it as a definite decision, and shall leave Beech-holmes at once. The one thing I do not intend is to be tossed to and fro by a haughty woman's caprice."

"That is the only thing you do not intend!" commented Bruna. If he had seen the expression of her face when she said that, he might have been warned. "Well,"

she added, "I do not think you will find me capricious. My mind once made up, I think I shall follow out my purpose unflinchingly to the bitter end."

No more was said between them then, for Ann came back.

Percy was, next day, a good deal annoyed by his friend's refusal to accompany him to The Towers.

"I specially wanted to introduce you there, Malcolm."

"I can't see any good in being introduced there, or anywhere, considering my close-approaching departure, and my destination," was Mr. Malcolm's answer.

After a brief discussion, Percy said,

"You have talked sometimes lately in a manner quite new to you, Malcolm—the semi-desperate manner of a man inwardly ill-content. What is it? I hope, dear old fellow, you have met with no disappointment that you have taken to heart?"

Percy was thinking of Ann, who, he

fancied, had seemed colder and more constrained with Mr. Malcolm during the last few days.

"Disappointment that I have taken to heart!" was echoed scoffingly. "My good boy, one would think you were talking to a girl in her teens. I have met with no disappointment, I assure you—quite the other way."

"Things are going well with you, then?"

"I will not say that. What I will say is, my good fellow, don't bother. As to going to The Towers to-day, I will not, and there's an end of the matter."

So Percy went alone. The wind had risen in the night, and the persistent rain had changed to occasional heavy storms. With the wind Bruna's spirits had risen; or was it with the necessity for action? Any way, to-day she seemed a different creature. At lunch she said,

"Mr. Malcolm, I mean to walk this afternoon to the little ruin on the hill, which we

have christened St. Ann's Chapel. If you choose to accompany me, I can promise you a view worth seeing."

"Not in such weather," interposed Ann.

"Exactly in such weather I most care to climb there, Ann; there will be grand gleams and glooms over the hills and woods and plains to-day; and there will, I expect, be a fine stormy sunset."

"But, Bruna, it will be such dreadful walking."

"I don't care; I mean to go up there this afternoon. Of course Mr. Malcolm can do as he likes about going with me."

"Of course Mr. Malcolm is ready to attend you," was his reply.

Bruna locked her door when she went up to her own room. She wished to avoid Ann's argument and remonstrance. When Ann was ready to start for her school, she found Bruna and Mr. Malcolm waiting to accompany her to the door. Even then Ann said,

"I wish you would give up the idea of going so far, Bruna. The weather is so wild; the dusk comes on so early. And you are almost always ill after these long walks."

"This walk to-day, after two whole days in the house, will do me a world of good. As to the wild weather and the dusk, surely, Ann, Mr. Malcolm is big enough to take care of me. Think how often I have been up there, late, alone."

"And I would rather to-day you should be up there late, alone," was what Ann did not say, and hardly knew she thought; and yet Bruna knew her thought almost as surely as if she had said those words. Bruna kissed her, and turned away; and Ann, pausing in the wood-bined porch of her school, looked after those two, wistful-eyed and anxious-hearted. Ann would have been troubled to give a name to the cause of her uneasiness, but she was uneasy; not so much about this one walk as about the

whole tone and tenor of Bruna's conduct of late, and especially of her intercourse with Mr. Malcolm.

That Bruna loved Mr. Malcolm was an idea far too monstrous to have occurred to Ann; besides, there had been nothing in Bruna's manner to Mr. Malcolm, nor anything, as far as Ann could understand, in Mr. Malcolm's conduct to Bruna, suggesting love between them. But Ann, being what a modern young lady might call an "old-fashioned little body," felt that there was a something in their "way" one towards another disagreeably suggestive of more intimacy, familiarity, confidence than old-fashioned Ann thought it "nice" should subsist between a man and a woman who were, or ought to be, no more than passing acquaintances. Even had Bruna been married to Percy, Ann would not have felt that dangerous plea, "He's my husband's most intimate friend," as any excuse for the sort

of thing which now, unconsciously, pained her. In short, Ann was jealous—for Percy.

CHAPTER XII.

TERMS OF SURRENDER.

IT turned out a gorgeous sort of afternoon: rich in colour everywhere, in heaven and in earth, and so it seemed from the strength of the reflections, even in mid-air

It was now late October. The first part of their walk was quite silent, but before they reached the ruined chapel on the hill-top, they had both said enough to show that each recognised the momentous and decisive nature of this day's encounter. At the top, sheltered by a bit of crumbling wall from the wild west wind, Bruna seated herself. The sky and the atmosphere were

already full of sunset colour and effect.

"Well, Mr. Malcolm, is this not worth the climb?" asked Bruna.

"What mocking devil possesses you to assume that I have senses for the outside world at such a crisis?" was his answer.

"If I have, why not you?" she questioned. "I surely have the most at stake. And I am going to try to print it all on my memory, to be recalled—when and where? The brown of that turned-up earth, with the delicate storm glare upon it, is much the same as the brown of the bracken, and of that group of stunted oaks. The green of the grass is vivid and velvety after the late rains. And there below, but not too low, lies Beech-holmes, the warm grey of the old house further warmed by the colour of the atmosphere, which deepens even the burning russet of the beech-woods. Beyond, and further below, the wide plain, brooded over by ethereal vapours, with here a rich depth of cloud-shadow, and there a keen

gleam. And then the distance, with its hues of purple, of grey, of pearl, of nearer and further hills, the nearer solid and purple, the further just defined in pearl-tinted light. Mr. Malcolm, is it not wonderful and beautiful? Are your eyes blind that you cannot see?"

Mr. Malcolm walked to and fro in front of her, and took no heed either of the prospect or of what she said. Bruna looked open-eyed, elate, but Mr. Malcolm gloomy-browed, with an expression of a savage sort of shame.

"Have you ended your ill-timed rhapsody?" he presently asked.

"Why ill-timed? Are we not both contemplating a splendid self-sacrifice? Is not that a time to open our hearts to the ennobling influences of nature, and so let them soothe and console us?"

"Take care, Miss D'Almeida. You may carry your mockery too far, and sting me to——"

"To repentance?" she asked, demurely.

"I begin to suspect you are playing with me, have befooled me; even a woman could hardly be so frivolous on the brink of such a gulf as that on which we stand."

"Suppose you are right," said Bruna, "and when we go home I say to Percy, 'Your friend, in his devotion to your interests, has been willing to take me off your hands; but, Percy, I had rather not.' What then?"

"Miss D'Almeida, I cannot stay here to be baited for your amusement."

He turned away. She remained quite passive, and by-and-by he resumed his pacing to and fro in front of her.

Much as a cat watches a mouse she has already maimed beyond its power to escape, Bruna watched him; and yet occasionally there came into her eyes something of relenting pity. Her victim suffered horribly, of that there was no doubt; more than once he lifted his hat, and with his handker-

chief wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"Mr. Malcolm," she presently said, "I am serious now. Treachery is not easy to either of us—it makes you savage, and it makes me mad, but I am serious now."

"It is time. I must be ensured from your bitter-tongued scorn, or I will not speak."

"You know quite well it is I, not you, who have to fear scorn."

"I know quite well that so superb a creature may fear the passion she rouses, whether of hate or love, but can never have reason to fear scorn."

Her face blazed angrily at something in the expression of his. She would so willingly have struck him! She had it almost on her tongue, poor foolish girl, to threaten him with Percy's vengeance for that look, that tone. And then she was conscious of a sob rising in her throat as she remembered that she had already virtually abandoned all

right for ever to Percy's protection. She remained silent, and, as he went on to speak, it was some consolation to her to find how much of what she felt so galling in his bitter, brusque, insulting manner was not contempt of her, but self-contempt.

"What I told you I was ready to do, I repeat that I am ready to do. So ready that my only stipulation is that it must be done at once. I no longer attempt to deceive either you, Miss D'Almeida, or myself. It is no sacrifice to friendship I am prepared to make. It is treacherous betrayal of friendship, for the sake of self-gratification. I am, truly, what you have taken such pleasure in proclaiming me to be, in tempting me on, goading me on to be—a traitor! Doubtless I make a sacrifice, but not to my friend, but of myself to myself. Friend! I have no friend! What is Percy to me compared with—— But this is idiotic raving! Are you prepared, Miss D'Almeida, for my hatred of you, as the instrument of my degrada-

tion, when the first madness of passion is past?"

There came a strange expression on Bruna's face, and a strange feeling at her heart, as she listened to this. Was it of repentance? Had she, for the first time, a misgiving as to whether her tool might not be too little altogether ignoble to be used as a mere tool?

"You are honest and clear-sighted—for a traitor, Mr. Malcolm," she said; adding, "I had rather you had been less so. I had rather you had kept up the farce of assuming to be the self-sacrificing, devoted friend to the end."

"Why so?" he asked, with sudden sharp suspicion.

"I cannot tell—perhaps it may be because the more I can scorn you the less I need to scorn myself."

"I don't understand you."

"I don't see how you should. Probably I don't understand myself—no matter."

"Well," he said, "I don't know how you had foreseen that it should be done. I only say, by stealth and soon. A traitorous thing done traitorously!"

"'If 'tis done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly'!" she returned; adding, "I should say to-morrow. If to-morrow is not possible, then the next day. By stealth, of course. What other way could it be done?"

"There is another way. To tell it all to Percy."

"Oh! no, no, no, that would not do at all!" she said, agitatedly; "I could not bear that way!"

"Nor could I. As for to-morrow—to-morrow is impossible. The next day is the soonest possible. There are arrangements to make, things to think of. Your haste is the haste of desperation, Miss D'Almeida."

"That is true."

"Black traitor as I am, however, I am not so black but that I would have you take

yet some time for thought—even if thought should mean repentance. To me it is all a bitterly perplexed business. I do not dare believe you love me!"

A pause. Bruna said nothing, tried to look nothing.

"Even now," he said, "before we arrange further the how of our flight, I would have you think—of what it is you lose, of how little it is you gain! I shall leave you here alone for half an hour."

She looked after him with a bitter smile as he turned away. "He does not dare believe I love him!" she said. "What, then, I wonder, does he believe?"

For once the beauty seemed to drop from her face, as if it had been only a mask, and left it, by comparison, old and careworn.

"I did not think the man would make me suffer for him!" she said. "It is too hard! Nothing but pain on all sides! I thought, at least, there would be sweetness in revenge! And there shall be!" Volun-

tarily she turned her thoughts on Percy, stimulating her anger against Percy's false friend. "His own familiar friend, in whom he trusted! My poor, poor Percy! how you too will suffer; but only for awhile, and then you will be happy, so happy, with Ann!"

The half-hour came to an end, and Mr. Malcolm again confronted her. He had her answer: she would leave Beech-holmes with him as soon as might be. She made only one stipulation: she must have his promise that he would not see, write to, or hold any communication with anyone belonging to Beech-holmes for upwards of five years from the time of their flight.

"Is it likely I should wish to do so?"

"I must have your solemn promise not to do so."

"You may have my oath," and he swore such an oath as startled her.

"And now we can go home," said Bruna.

"If, even at the last moment, Miss D'Almeida, you repent, you shall be free, and your secret for ever buried."

"You are generous, Mr. Malcolm. Repent I shall, no doubt, but not till it is long too late."

"Even now you are the picture of superb despair."

"Did you expect me to be radiant with happiness?"

"Incomprehensible girl! How I love and hate you!"

"Of the latter I will hear as much as you please, Mr. Malcolm; of the former, at present, nothing."

They silently began their descent towards Beech-holmes, through the dim, rich beauty of the decaying world; the ground beneath them carpeted with the moist, shining leaves (black-purple leaves from the orchards, sunny brown from the oaks, sickly sun-coloured from the ash, speckled yellow of elm, burning russet of beech), catching a

glow from the sunset colour lingering in the sky.

At one point, from which Beech-holmes was to be seen to great advantage, Bruna stopped. They were still on high ground; she leant a few moments against a beech-tree trunk, turning her back upon her companion.

"Beautiful Beech-holmes!" she more than once repeated.

"Yes, beautiful Beech-holmes!" he repeated after her—"beautiful Beech-holmes, of which any day you might be mistress for life, and which you give up, for what? It is that I want to know," he questioned, almost fiercely—"for what?"

She turned towards him as she answered,

"Suppose I choose to say for love? You would not believe me, and yet, as I mean it, it might be true. As to the beauty of Beech-holmes," she added, as she walked on, "beauty is not for me, nor goodness; both are burdensome to me, so the day

after to-morrow I bid them both good-bye."

"With goodness, evidently, you do not credit me."

"I did not imagine, Mr. Malcolm, that you even supposed you could be credited with goodness any more than with beauty; and yet, beyond anything you know, I am putting trust in your generosity of honour."

He pondered some time over this, then pressed her for an explanation; but she refused to give him any, merely saying her words would explain themselves at no very distant day.

By-and-by he asked her a strange question for him to ask, and now—if she were sure she did not love Percy.

"*You* were quite sure I did not only a few days ago," she answered him; and then, after a pause, went on to say—"Is this to love him? You shall judge. When he is absent, I think of him tenderly; I am full of remorse for my last ill-usage of him, and almost desire him back, that I may treat

him better. When he is beside me, the very sound of his voice and expression of his face half kill me with *ennui.* Tired as I may be of loneliness and of my own thoughts, I long to be alone again, and with only my own thoughts, rather than to suffer the intolerable weariness of his presence. Is this to love him?—for I am not sure I do not love him."

"At least this cannot be to love him in any way that can be for his happiness."

After a long silence, and when they were already in the park, Mr. Malcolm said, with savage gloom,

"Let me give you one word of warning, Miss D'Almeida. You said just now something about trusting beyond what I knew in the generosity of my honour. Trust in nothing of the kind. I am full of suspicion, without knowing what to suspect. I would warn you not to put yourself in my power, and then let me know I have all along been only your dupe."

The thought that answered this in her heart was, "A woman who is not afraid to die need not dread dishonour;" by which it will be seen that she was now wound up to a great pitch of excitement. The words with which she answered were a modification of that thought. She said, "I will not court danger unprovided with the means of escape." Then she added—it was now quite dark—"Some one is coming towards us. I think the step is Percy's."

"Your ear is quick to detect Percy's step," he said, jealously; and then laughed at his own jealousy. He added, "We cannot meet him—not now, not yet. Let us take the side path. Come, Miss D'Almeida, quick—he cannot have distinguished us."

He laid his heavy hand upon her shoulder; she slipped from under it.

"Speak for yourself, Mr. Malcolm. You cannot meet him perhaps. I both can and will."

Her tone was of pride in herself and scorn of her companion, and gave him something to think over, as through by-ways he reached the house.

Bruna and Percy met.

"Dear, I have been looking for you for the last hour. Alone so late! It really is not safe, Bruna. Ann said Malcolm was with you."

"So he was up to the moment of our meeting you. He left me when he knew you were coming, thinking, perhaps, we should like a *tête-à-tête*."

"Thinking perhaps he would like a good smoke before dinner," laughed Percy. "I hope you have not been quarrelling all the way. It seemed to me this morning as if Malcolm, for some reason best known to himself, were in a very quarrelsome humour just now."

"No, we have not been quarrelling all the way," she answered. Then she put her

hand on his arm, and said, with almost a sob in her voice, "But I'm tired—so tired, Percy."

"Poor darling! Why will you walk so far?"

"The restlessness of the animal, which drives it further to fare worse," was her reply. Then, suddenly, she kissed his hand. "Oh! Percy, my poor Percy! how much I have made you suffer! Forgive me, dear, forgive me, it will all be different soon!"

On that she had to submit to a rapturous embrace, Percy putting his own coustruction upon her words. She did more than submit; she threw her arms round his neck, and kissed him as she had never done before. That was when she said "good-bye" to Percy. After that she took but little notice of him.

Bruna did not dine downstairs that day, nor come into the drawing-room in the evening. She was too tired, she told Ann, and had a bad headache. Upon which Ann

cooed over her pityingly and tenderly, and forbore to say "I told you so."

Mr. Malcolm was absent from Beechholmes all next day, "on business," he told Percy; and Bruna, that day, kept almost entirely to her room.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE VERGE.

"HOW ill you look this morning, Bruna!" was Ann's exclamation, as, on what Bruna held to be her last day at Beechholmes, she came into Ann's rooms.

"I have not slept, dearest, that is all. It is no matter. I shall be better soon."

"If you are not, Bruna, I shall send for a doctor."

"I am going to be my own doctor, Ann. I intend to take my case into my own hands."

"What do you mean, Bruna?"

"Something and nothing. Nothing to make you look startled," Bruna answered,

and passed on to one of the windows. She moved quietly and spoke dreamily, seeming as if her tormenting spirit were, for the time, laid. As she stood there looking out, she began to repeat a passage Ann had heard her quote very often of late.

> "Entbehren sollst du! Sollst entbehren!
> Das ist der ewige Gesang
> Der jedem an die Ohren klingt,
> Den unser ganzes Leben lang,
> Uns heiser jede Stunde singt."

She added with more energy—

> "Und so ist mir das Daseyn eine Last,
> Der Tod erwünscht, das Leben mir verhasst!"

Turning half round to Ann, Bruna went on—

"I am come to the conclusion, Ann, that I am one of those unhappy people of whom it does not much matter what becomes, as they have not the faculty of being happy themselves nor of making others happy, having been born with a devil of discontent in possession. I can fancy that, even if I loved, resting for the first time in the arms

of my lover, his first kisses warm upon my lips, I should already inwardly question, 'Is this all?' and should feel myself sicken with the sense of the insufficiency of 'love, life, all things.' Very melodramatic Mr. Malcolm would pronounce what I have just said to be. Probably, in so pronouncing, he would be quite right! A wise man in his generation is Mr. Malcolm, Ann. I don't think you like Mr. Malcolm, Ann. You have quite left off defending him from my attacks."

"Is it not rather, Bruna, that you have left off attacking him?"

"Perhaps so, dear. But don't you like him, Ann?"

"Do you, Bruna?" Ann's cheeks had flushed.

"Do I like Mr. Malcolm? No, I do not like him. As I told Percy the first time we spoke of him after I had seen him, Mr. Malcolm is not a man to be liked."

There was a pause. "Do you love him?"

Ann could not bring herself to ask. That question to Bruna it seemed to her would be too monstrous an insult. And yet—

"Bruna," she presently began, "you said just now, 'even if you loved.' That was a strange thing for you to say. You do love, Bruna—you love Percy."

Ann's flush had deepened, and she spoke timidly. To Ann, Love was a sacred thing, to be spoken of rarely and with reticence; yet, perhaps, not in this lay all the difficulty with which she spoke.

Bruna did not immediately answer, and Ann's tone as she repeated, "You do love, Bruna. You love Percy," was urgent and pleading. "Surely you love Percy?"

Bruna answered her slowly and reflectingly.

"I think not, Ann—not as you mean. I do not think I love Percy as you mean; I do not think I shall ever love any one in the way you mean, in the way poets and novelists write about. I don't think it is in

me to do it; I am too selfish, or something. I don't think there could ever be for me any moment so beautiful that I should wish to detain it for ever. I think I shall always feel of life—

> 'Happy thou art not;
> For what thou hast not, still thou striv'st to get,
> And what thou hast, forget'st.'

Whatever happiness, or approach to it, life may have for me, will come from 'striving to get' from any kind of work that exercises me. At least, this is what I believe."

"That you, of all women, Bruna, should feel in this way, is so strangely sad."

Ann was now quite pale again.

"So strangely sad, so sadly strange," muttered Bruna. "Come here to the window, Ann. See how dark it is! What a storm is coming!"

Ann went to the window.

"It is a black, bleak, unfriendly day," she said; and was then going back to her work at the fireside, but Bruna detained her,

and, keeping her face turned to the light, said abruptly,

"Question for question, Ann, is only fair. I cannot be mistaken, Ann, in believing that *you* love Percy?"

For the first instant Ann's eyes expressed only mild astonishment at the unnecessary question.

"Of course, Bruna, you are not mistaken. Love Percy!—of course I love Percy—love him dearly—always have loved him!"

So far she spoke freely and unembarrassed; then something in the sound of her own words, or something in the way in which Bruna's eyes were fixed on hers, brought a pink tinge over all the fairness of her face; but, in spite of that, and though the clear depths of her eyes were a little troubled, there was no sign of painful shame, nor of self-consciousness that had in it any self-accusation.

After an instant of what seemed like hesi-

tation on Bruna's part, Bruna went on to say—

"You do not understand me, Ann. My question to you means all yours to me just now meant. When I say I cannot be mistaken in thinking that you love Percy, Ann, I mean love him with love—not only with friendship and sisterly affection, but with the love of love—with the love that would make you feel that to be his wife, always with him, Summer and Winter, day and night, would be the most blessed lot this world could offer you."

It was no delicate pink that now suffused Ann's face, but a crimson flush, the heat of which made her eyes tingle, and then fill with stinging tears.

"Oh! Bruna, Bruna, Bruna!" cried poor Ann, "what have I done? What have I done that you should say this to me?"

She hid her burning face in her slender hands.

"It is nothing you have done, you sweet

innocent darling!" said Bruna, caressing her. "You have done nothing. I even believe, Ann, that I have told you what you did not know, what you did not suspect; but it is true, Ann—quite, quite true."

"No, Bruna, it cannot be," answered Ann. She lifted up her poor face, and tried to speak firmly. "How could it be?" she went on, a tremor in her voice. "I have always thought of Percy as to be your husband; I have always loved him as a sister loves a dear brother. It cannot be true, Bruna!—it cannot be true! And, oh! how I wish you had not said it!"

"It is true, Ann—I am glad I said it. It needed to be said."

"How can you be glad of what has so bitterly pained me?"

"One day you too will be glad."

"I will try all I can, Bruna, as fast as I can, to forget what you have said."

"You will not be able to forget it, Ann, darling."

"I will try to be able—I will pray to be able," sighed Ann. She slipped from under Bruna's relaxing hold, and crept out of the room, to kneel at her bedside, and ask for strength to bear the humiliation laid upon her. To herself she said, as she had said to Bruna, not that it was not, but that it could not be true.

Half an hour afterwards she found Bruna standing exactly in the same attitude and position in which she had left her: apparently absorbed in watching the gathering blackness of the coming storm.

"I am glad it is over," Bruna exclaimed, turning from the window when she heard Ann enter. She gave no sign of remembering what had passed between them.

"Glad what is over, Bruna?"

"The Summer."

"Why, Bruna, you hate and dread the cold."

"I know, and I would rather actively hate than passively endure."

With these words, Bruna crossed the room towards the door. When she came close behind Ann, she stopped, put her hand on Ann's shoulder, and said,

"Ann, I intend to take a good hard ride with Mr. Malcolm this afternoon. No remonstrance, dear—I intend to do it. Neither of us mind the wind or the rain, either for ourselves or for each other. We shall go alone together, and feel free to get as muddy and as wet as we please. Percy has gone to town for some books I wanted. If—if I break my neck, and never come back, Ann, the books are books you will like, Ann."

She stooped and kissed Ann's head, holding it in her hands, so that Ann could not turn and look at her. Ann did attempt the most earnest remonstrance, which Bruna cut short by running away from her, and locking herself into her own room.

At lunch-time Ann again remonstrated; she even appealed to Mr. Malcolm, begging

him to dissuade Bruna from going for "a good hard ride" in such weather, and when she was far from well.

"She is not nearly as strong as she thinks herself, Mr. Malcolm. She has not been well since she overtaxed herself with that long walk the day before yesterday. The weather now is quite unfit for her, and I am sure it will get worse towards sunset. Please, Mr. Malcolm, ask her not to go."

"I can hardly do that, Miss Travers." Mr. Malcolm paused, then he added—"To do that would be to presume that I have influence—more influence than you have. The most I can do is to refrain from asking her to go. I do not ask you to go, Miss D'Almeida. Shall we postpone our ride to a more favourable day?"

To herself Bruna muttered "Coward!"—to him she answered, carelessly, and without meeting his intense gaze,

"I consider the day particularly favourable. In less than half an hour I will be

ready—always supposing, Mr. Malcolm, that you are not afraid—of the weather."

He rose, with his always uncouth bow, and left the room. Ann came to Bruna's knees with reiterated entreaty, ending with,

"Bruna—dear Bruna, let me run after Mr. Malcolm, and tell him I have dissuaded you from riding to-day."

"Let her run after Mr. Malcolm, and tell him she has dissuaded me from riding to-day!" echoed Bruna, thoughtfully—"shall I?"

"Do, darling, do!"

"No, Ann, I will not."

"Oh! Bruna, why will you not?"

"Because I love you, Ann. You will have a reason, so that must serve for want of a better."

Ann rose from her knees, feeling pained at what she thought to be Bruna's mockery. Bruna said,

"It seems strange that about just this one

ride you should make such a fuss, Ann. I have often ridden in weather as wild."

"I don't myself understand why, Bruna, but I feel as if I would sacrifice anything that you should give up this ride!"

"But I will not! I cannot! I have a restlessness upon me which this ride will cure."

She left the room to go and prepare herself. Ann, passing her door presently, thought she heard a sob; she softly tried the handle, but could not get in. Instead of half an hour, it was fully an hour before Bruna was ready. Then she went to Ann.

"I am going now, dear!" She took Ann in her arms, and held her close, and kissed her with many kisses, and felt, indeed, as if her own heart were breaking.

Ann followed Bruna down to the hall, where Mr. Malcolm was waiting; the horses were being led up and down outside.

"Don't you take a groom with you?" she

asked, noticing that the man who held the horses was not in riding livery.

"James is away for the day. You would not have me take old John's rheumatism out in this wind!" Bruna answered; but she did not answer till she had paused for a moment, to see if Mr. Malcolm would not speak.

"You will take what care you can of her, Mr. Malcolm?" Ann said. "She's in a reckless humour to-day. Think of Percy, Mr. Malcolm, if anything should happen to her!"

Mr. Malcolm's eyes declined to meet the pleading look in Ann's as she said this.

"You must not come out in the cold, Ann."

Saying that, Bruna shut the inner glass-door of the hall between Ann and Mr. Malcolm and herself. She descended the steps. Ann saw her, before she mounted, pick a late-lingering rose from the wall, and fasten it into her habit. Ann continued to watch; she could not see Mr. Malcolm's face, but

when he touched Bruna, helping her into the saddle, she saw such a look of disgust and dread (so it seemed to her) darken Bruna's face, as made her think—

"It is surely not love but hatred she has for him. How strange it is, how very strange, that she should choose to be so much with him!"

As if to heighten, by contrast, the impression made by that look, Bruna, just as she gathered up her reins, and began to move away, looked back on Ann with a face of such yearning tenderness as made her say,

"How beautiful she is, and how she loves me! If only she could love Percy as she loves me, how happy it would make him!"

Then, as, having watched them out of sight, she turned back into the house, Ann was reminded, by the heaviness of her heart, of the painful consciousness that Bruna had wakened in her to-day. Slowly mounting the stairs, she said,

"It cannot be true. I must not think about it. What can I do to make me forget it?"

CHAPTER XIV.

FOUR AND TWENTY HOURS.—THE FIRST OF THEM.

THE beeches were tossing their thin brown hands with what seemed to Bruna threatening significance as she and Mr. Malcolm crossed the park; but Mr. Malcolm far more regarded the threatening significance of the black purple of piled up clouds, which the wind, blowing in their faces, was driving towards them. The gate-keeper's wife spoke a warning word to Bruna about the weather as she rode by; but Bruna did not see or hear her; she was absorbed in enduring her anguish—the parting from Ann and Beech-holmes had

been no less than anguish when it came to the last.

When they were free of the park, and out on the high road, Mr. Malcolm, after more than one glance at his companion's set stern face, questioned,

"Do you repent? Shall we return? It is not too late."

"Are you afraid?" was all her answer, with as much scorn as possible compressed into the few words.

After that they rode on, almost at a gallop, and in complete silence, for two or three miles. Then he asked her if she was not tired.

"Tired or not does not matter. Nothing matters. Let us push on."

A few minutes after he shouted out—he was obliged to shout to make himself heard—

"For heaven's sake, sit firm, Miss D'Almeida, the storm is upon us!"

The wind came first, blowing blackness in their faces, for a moment almost stifling

them. Bruna's hat was lifted, and whirled away. Mr. Malcolm was not aware of this till some time after, but had he been, to stop and try to recover it would not have been possible. Then came the rain, dashed against them in torrents, the first shock of it literally depriving them of breath. Their good horses flew on swiftly and unswervingly, hoping soon to gain the shelter of some familiar inn-stable. It had all at once become dark.

For a few seconds Bruna had experienced a wild instinctive physical alarm; she did not expect to be able to keep her seat; and then, when the rain dashed on her uncovered head, the same instinctive and physical self-commiseration. That was only for a few seconds, and was followed by a mad exultation, as she recognised that to her fierce inward misery this outward disaster served only as counter-irritation. She turned to her companion with almost a smile, as if she challenged his enjoyment of

the situation. But Mr. Malcolm, chiefly on her account, was appalled by this incident of their flight. Five minutes had sufficed to wet them through, and the rain continued to pour down in torrents. To Mr. Malcolm, too, it seemed that so rapid a pace on the streaming roads was dangerous; but neither Bruna nor the horses were to be checked, so they rode on and on, till a steep hill made the tired creatures slacken their speed. By this time the rain had somewhat abated.

As they entered the town at the crest of this hill, Mr. Malcolm said,

"It is well your portmanteau is here, Miss D'Almeida." When they stopped at the door of the inn, at which a carriage had been ordered to be in readiness, he said, "You will have time, while the horses are being put in, to change your dress." Calling the landlady, he told her to attend the lady.

"I prefer to go on at once, as I am," Bruna answered. "Hurry them with the

horses, Mr. Malcolm. I will not go inside the house."

"This is madness, Miss D'Almeida. A quarter of an hour's delay can make no difference."

"I choose to remain as I am."

"This is the most stupid obstinacy," he exclaimed, fiercely; adding, in a tone he tried to soften, "Think what a painful complication would be brought about by your illness."

"I shall not be ill," she answered, scornfully. "People as miserable as I am, to whom life is as hateful as it is to me to-day, don't take cold."

"Must I insist on your obedience?"

"If you do, you will make a great mistake," was her haughty answer. "This is the carriage intended for us, I suppose? I will get into it at once. They can put the horses in afterwards."

Raging inwardly at being worsted in this first conflict of wills, and really alarmed for

the consequences of her folly, Mr. Malcolm could, however, then and there, do nothing but hand Bruna into the carriage, where she hastened to hide herself from the curiosity and commiseration of the landlady, having refused all offers of refreshment as obstinately as she had refused to change her dress.

"If suicide is your object," Mr. Malcolm remarked, "you might have set about it in some more simple and direct manner, and without making me your accomplice."

"It might then have lost all its charm," she sneered. She did not refuse to muffle herself in some warm shawls and wrappers he handed to her (her own property); but as she did so, she reiterated her desire that not a minute should be lost.

"You must allow me five minutes to attend to my own condition," he said. "Suicide in the shape of rheumatic fever is not to my taste, if it is to yours."

In less than five minutes he had changed

his soaked coat for a warm and dry one, had tossed off a tumbler of some hot mixture, and, well swathed in bulky rugs, was seated beside the driver.

"About the horses?" questioned Bruna, putting her head from the window.

"They will be well cared-for to-night, and taken to Beech-holmes in the morning. I sent no message with them—they will tell their own story."

"Indeed they will," groaned Bruna, as she crouched back in a corner. "Their own story will not be a true story, however," she added to herself, with the ghost of a smile.

Stopping, of course, to change horses, they posted on all night—a night of physical and mental misery to Bruna, which she ignorantly thought could hardly be surpassed. Alone in the night and the darkness, and under the depressing influences of cold, fatigue, and exhaustion, she was, at times, sore afraid—afraid lest her victim should

prove her destroyer; afraid lest her strength to carry through what she had undertaken, to the end, that should be for her triumphant, and for him most bitter, should fail her.

In the grim dawn of a drizzling November morning, they stopped at the chief hotel in a large sea-port town. When Mr. Malcolm helped Bruna from the carriage, he was shocked at the change in her. Perhaps for the first time he realized a little of what she had suffered and sacrificed, and something of the responsibility he had assumed.

"My poor girl, you look dreadfully ill," he said, pityingly. "Have you been very cold?"

The familiarity of that address—(it was the first time there had been in his manner the faintest approach to an assumption of lover-like tenderness)—roused Bruna, and made her rally her forces, as nothing else would have done. She took no notice of

his question; she ignored all his awkward attempts to care for her comfort.

"You need not trouble yourself. I will give my own orders," she said.

"Very well," he answered. "I will, in that case, go down to the harbour at once, to inquire what time our vessel is to sail." He turned on his heel, and went away. Bruna, echoing "*our* vessel," smiled to herself as she followed the landlady up the stairs.

Mr. Malcolm did not come back for a couple of hours. In that time Bruna had managed to make herself both look and feel less physically miserable. With the help of a servant she had unpacked the portmanteau, and completely changed her dress, before a good fire; her hair had been dried and neatly arranged, and she had taken some hot coffee.

Leaving the girl to clean and fold her discarded garments, Bruna went to await Mr. Malcolm in the sitting-room, where she had

ordered that breakfast should be prepared for him.

Notwithstanding the change for the better in her appearance, Mr. Malcolm still thought Bruna looking alarmingly ill when he joined her. Coming to her side as she sat by the fire, he began some expression of solicitude; but she waved him from her, and, pointing to the table, said,

"Breakfast is ready for you. You must want something. You had better sit down and eat and drink; we can talk afterwards."

"For sitting down to eat and drink I have, just now, no time and no inclination," he answered.

"At least take some hot coffee," she urged, with that woman's instinct of caring for the physical comfort even of one on whom she meant to inflict metaphysical torture, which many a man, at some desperate crisis of passion, has unjustly resented as mockery, refined cruelty, from some woman he loved, and who would not love him.

Mr. Malcolm was blunt enough of perception to feel flattered by Bruna's urgency, to take it as a sign of relenting severity.

"If you will pour it out for me, I will drink it," he was foolish enough to answer.

She rose and did as he asked, but he could not help seeing that the expression of her face, as she did so, was one which would well have suited the occasion, had it been a cup of poison she prepared for him. That expression drove him to say,

"Perhaps, even now, Miss D'Almeida, what we have done is not irrevocable. Percy, being so guileless himself, is easy of belief. This night's adventure might be explained away. I would leave the needful lying to you—it comes easier to women than to men."

"Why do you say this?" she asked.

"Because, judging by your face, your regrets are becoming intolerable."

"I have no regrets," answered Bruna. "I mean I have no feeling that would

make me wish undone the thing I have done."

"That is indeed good hearing."

He attempted to make his tone cheery and self-gratulatory, but meeting the look in Bruna's eyes as he began to speak, he did not very well succeed in doing so. Still worse did he, by-and-by, succeed, trying to speak in a matter-of-course, off-hand sort of fashion, standing before the fire sipping his coffee, as he said,

"I have taken for granted that you would wish the marriage to be here, before we sail. I have arranged everything concerning it, except the exact time. It was this kept me away so long. How soon can you be ready?"

Bruna roused herself for battle. This was the supreme moment, anticipated sometimes with deadly qualms of indefinite dread, sometimes with the keen exultation of anticipated triumph.

"Of what marriage—of whose marriage

are you speaking?" she asked, in a tone of cold surprise.

"What folly or affectation dictates such a question?" was his demand.

Intending to set the cup he had been holding upon the table, he, in the blindness of sudden anger, let it fall with a crash upon the floor. Smouldering suspicion had instantly, on her words, taken fire. His face reddened wrathfully, and the hot glow kindled in his eyes as he added,

"Of what marriage could I possibly be thinking or speaking except of yours with me?"

"Your delusion has really gone that whole wild length, Mr. Malcolm?" Bruna questioned slowly.

She looked at that moment superbly handsome; excitement seemed to have repaired the night's devastation of her beauty.

"Explain yourself fully, Miss D'Almeida. Do you mean that you do not intend to sai

from here to-day—with me, and as my wife?"

Some women would have been touched by the hoarseness with which the last words were spoken. If Bruna was, she gave no sign of being so. She answered, with the same cold quietness,

"I propose to sail from here to-day, Mr. Malcolm, but certainly not with you, nor as your wife."

When she had said that, there followed a most dangerous pause—a pause that shook her inward composure more than any words he could have uttered would have done.

Then, evidently with a desperate effort to keep calm, he said,

"You spoke just now of delusion, Miss D'Almeida. The delusion is on your part, if you think you can now escape me. For what do you take me, that you should imagine I will tamely submit to have been used as your dupe, your tool, and will not insist either upon revenge or reward?"

"For what do I take you, Mr. Malcolm? For something better than a brute! For a man, and a man not wholly without generosity of nature!"

"This, then, is what you were contemplating, when you told me you were trusting beyond what I knew to the generosity of my honour? But I warned you, Miss D'Almeida, I warned you! Warned and open-eyed you have walked into a snare of your own setting, and you must take the consequences!"

"I am prepared to take the consequences, though not such consequences as you would impose upon me," was her cold, quiet answer.

That cold quietness of scorn at once stimulated his rage, and controlled the expression of it. Silently trying to master himself, he paced to and fro. From the very beginning of this contest he had an unrecognized conviction that, do or say what he might, he should come out of it worsted

and vanquished. What he said next, when he presently stopped in front of her, was, without his intending it to be so, almost a confession of this.

"It is like a woman's meanness to make a tool, a fool of a man, and then, when she is in his power, to turn on him with an appeal to his generosity—his honour!"

"I do not consider myself to be in any way in your power, Mr. Malcolm."

"Would you goad me on to make you *feel* yourself to be so?" was his question.

To that she only answered by turning her head aside, as if averting her face from something disgustingly distasteful.

"Mean as women are," he went on, "I think you can hardly be so mean as to have accepted from me the sacrifices I have made—of my friend, of my self-respect—without proposing for me some reward."

"You must at least have gained self-knowledge, Mr. Malcolm—a thing held to be of inestimable value. As to what reward

you can have proposed to yourself, it has been difficult for me to see. You yourself told me you did not dare believe I loved you—for what, then, should I marry you? As for your 'love' for me, if you have any, it has been shown, not only in a manner that was an insult, but that seemed intended to make me feel it to be such. For what manner of woman have you taken me, imagining for a moment I could contemplate being the wife of a man who has shown me neither affection, kindness, nor respect?"

"If you have not 'contemplated' marrying me, you will, nevertheless, have to do it!" was his roughly-spoken answer. He added, "There is one thing I can offer you which you will soon learn to be glad to accept—the protection of my name."

"Thank you," was her mocking answer; "but, indeed, I feel well able myself to protect anything that is left to me."

"Mad, misguided girl!" was his exclama-

tion. "You are as ignorant as a baby of the meaning of the words you use."

To this she deigned no answer—just leant her head back against the cushions of her chair with an air of supreme weariness. Wishing, at any rate, to make her speak, he questioned,

"Supposing, for one moment, that I let you go, what is it you propose to do with yourself?"

"There is no question of your letting me go. I am not in your keeping, but in my own. I am not without the means of proving that, if you should drive me to put it to the proof."

"That is grandly melodramatic," he sneered.

He resumed his furious pacing of the room. She remained perfectly still, gazing at the fire, looking as if she felt and thought nothing—but weariness.

About a quarter of an hour passed so; then, again, he paused in front of her.

"I have determined to give you an alternative, Miss D'Almeida."

"That is very kind of you, Mr. Malcolm." Spoken without any change of position or of expression.

"I will not accept the responsibility of having helped you to your ruin. You have deceived me, and you must now take the consequence of that deception. If you will not consent to marry me, I will take you back to Percy and Beech-holmes."

"You fool!" cried Bruna, roused from her real or apparent apathy, and forgetting all lady-like restraints of speech. "Take me back to Percy and Beech-holmes! If so, you will take not my living self, but my dead body! And it is you who propose to do this—you who, while my name was unspotted, and no man could speak half a word against my honour, held me so utterly unworthy to be your friend's wife that you spared no effort to separate us. It is you who would now thrust me back upon him;

and why? 'To save yourself the responsibility of having helped me to my ruin.' This, then, is the grandly unselfish devotion of a man's love for a man! Take me back to Percy and Beech-holmes! To Beech-holmes, where Ann is, after such an escapade as this! You call me 'ignorant as a baby;' but I know better than that the meaning, to the world, of what I have done. I accept no alternative from you, Mr. Malcolm; I deny your right to propose any to me—your power to force any upon me. The days are past when an unwilling damsel could be set upon a palfrey and borne wherever it might please a miscreant to take her! I accept no alternative. I deny your right to propose any; but if I were obliged to choose, rather the other than that!"

Almost maddened by her scorn, he said,

"Because I took you to Beech-holmes it does not follow you need stay there. Only

the next time you left it, you might be more careful in your choice of a groom."

As she made no reply to this, there was a brief cessation of hostilities. His anger began to cool down. Leaning his elbow on the chimney-piece, he contemplated his pale opponent, and she gave as little sign of consciousness of his scrutiny as if her face had been of the marble it resembled.

CHAPTER XV.

FOUR AND TWENTY HOURS.—THE LAST OF THEM.

IT was, by-and-by, in a moderate, almost gentle tone that he addressed her, asking her if she would give him her reasons for having acted as she had acted.

"I will give them you quite frankly, Mr. Malcolm," she answered, her eyes not leaving the fire. "I know, what you, too, know, that Ann, whom I love as I love nobody else in this world, loves Percy. I have been brought to believe that Percy, though I know he loves me, clings to me chiefly out of pity for my fate if he gives me up, and

would be happier with a gentler, better woman for his wife. I, therefore, wish them both to believe me as utterly lost, as if I were already dead. For doing this, have I not taken an effectual way? After a time Percy will marry Ann, and Ann will be happy. Dear Ann! How happy Ann will be!" The last words were spoken to herself, and most tenderly, as were those she added, "That will be something to think of —of how happy Ann will be!"

"You have, then, at least in some measure, sacrificed yourself for Ann?" he asked. And, somehow, something in the unexpectedness of what he had just heard, in the tenderness of the tone in which it had been spoken, in the utter forlornness—as it seemed to him—of the speaker, so touched him that the eyes which had so lately been furious and fiery suddenly grew moist.

"No," she answered, "I cannot delude myself into believing that I have made any unselfish sacrifice. My life at Beech-holmes

had become simply unendurable. I did not love Percy—if, now, I could almost believe I love him, it is only out of the perverseness of my nature, and because now I know I have for ever lost him!"

"I can see no sufficient reason for the course you have taken, Miss D'Almeida, except on the supposition that you sacrificed yourself for Ann; unless, indeed, the desire to be revenged on me for real or fancied wrongs done you, could have impelled you to act as you have done?"

"I looked to that to sweeten what I did; but certainly my feelings towards you, Mr. Malcolm—even my hatred and longing for revenge—were not strong enough alone to move me to do as I have done."

"For what, then, have you sacrificed yourself?"

"There has been no sacrifice. As I said, my life had become intolerable to me. The longing for freedom and action was growing to madness. I have been so happy"

(the stress she laid upon that word was of concentrated bitterness) "as to be able, as I trust, to serve my friends, to be revenged upon my enemy, and to gratify my own heart's desire for freedom to work out my own life, all by one action. Surely in this, at least, I may be counted fortunate?"

"There is no freedom possible for a beautiful woman who intends to preserve her self-respect," he said.

To that she made no answer; but her face showed it was only that she would not take the trouble to do so. After waiting a moment, he went on to say, in a tone that had undergone so great a change that it was now almost humble,

"If, Miss D'Almeida, you are sure that return to Beech-holmes is utterly, absolutely impossible——"

"It is utterly, absolutely impossible. I can imagine nothing that is more so."

"Then I implore you, for your own sake, to consider before you finally reject the other

alternative. All I now ask is that you should let me give you the protection of my name —that you should let me put you in safety—giving you, for the present, a home with my sister. It is little that I can offer you, but you have left yourself nothing."

"And to your little I infinitely prefer my nothing," she answered. "All the same I thank you. You deal with me more gently and more generously than I had any right to expect. But you do not seem as if you would understand that I do not propose to myself to vegetate, any more than to pine and to die, but at least to try to live as I call living."

Again a silence, during which Mr. Malcolm struggled to spare himself the scorn he foreknew he should call down upon his head if he spoke to her of love. But the struggle was unavailing, and by-and-by he found himself pleading, as for very life, that she would believe in his passionate love for her, and would at least give herself a chance of

loving him. For a time she listened, growing pale and red by turns, never looking at him. By-and-by she lifted her hand to stop him, saying,

"I can bear no more. Our humiliation, both yours and mine, is only too complete."

"Humiliation!—Yours! Miss D'Almeida, how have you misunderstood me?"

"There has been no room for misunderstanding, Mr. Malcolm. I hold it as humiliation, as unspeakable humiliation, that you, who have made no secret of your utter contempt of my character, should dare to talk to me of love! That you, who have loathed me, for my moral ugliness, should dare speak to me of love!"

"Good Heavens, Miss D'Almeida, don't take the thing in that way! It is now, first, that I know you for what you are. A woman who can make such a sacrifice as you have made, is a woman a man need not be ashamed to live and to die for."

"If it is only now, first, that you know

me, Mr. Malcolm, might you not have refrained from dogmatizing about and condemning me? Or might you not, at least, have refrained from dinning your harsh judgment of an almost friendless girl into the ears of the only creatures who loved her? If this step I have now taken is, as you now tell me it is, a mad one, you may have the satisfacton of knowing that you helped to drive me to it."

"Whatever my fault, my crime, in this matter may have been, my punishment and your revenge are, I venture to say, Miss D'Almeida, enough. You have tempted me on to betray my friend; you have made me the instrument of your own destruction. Enough!—they are too much—more than a man can submit to, and not try to clutch some compensation!"

"You need not reproach yourself beyond what is just. The instrument of my destruction you are not. I know I have lost my 'good name,' but I mean to make for my-

self a better name, and I will keep it as clear and pure as that of any stay-at-home girl. I am free; and, when I am a little further from the pain of the last few hours and days, I shall be able to exult in the thought of a glorious life, of freedom, fame, and power."

"God pity you! You are indeed deluded. The 'glorious life' you anticipate (if, as I suppose, you allude to an actress's career) will prove to be one of ignoble slavery, of distasteful drudgery, for niggardly reward."

"I do not wish to hear you on this more than on any other matter," she said impatiently. "Far more than for winning I care for fighting. And yet I will not fail; or, if I do, I will die."

"So say all ambitious and undisciplined natures. But yet, when the trial comes, they drag on a miserable existence, dying each day a thousand deaths, rather than

daring the one of which, at a distance, they speak so boldly."

"You may be wise, Mr. Malcolm, but I do not wish to listen to your wisdom. All has been said between us that need be said. Let us part now—at once."

There was one more contest—the bitterest. Bruna was wearied, but victorious. When again she urged him to leave her, he answered that, at least, he should see her safe on board.

"Can I go on board now, then, at once?" was her immediate question. "Surely you must feel, as I do, that the sooner we have done with each other the better for both of us."

"There must be something I can do for you first? You yourself must need to make some further preparation."

"You can do nothing. I want nothing—but some place where I can fling myself down to rest, and not need to move again for days or weeks."

He took up his hat.

"I will go and ascertain if you can go o board at once. What would you advise m to say to the captain? I took passage fc myself and my wife."

"Say what you please. What did yo pay, Mr. Malcolm? I have plenty c money."

"That was a question I wished to as you."

"It is answered, then. I have plenty c money. What do I owe you?"

"I have paid nothing as yet."

When he was gone, Bruna went upstair to the room where she had changed he dress to make her final preparations. Th girl who had before helped her was nov there, folding her habit, which had bee dried and brushed, and sobbing violently a she did so. The girl's face had intereste Bruna. A few kindly-put questions drev out the story of her trouble.

"Will you come to America with me a

my servant?" Bruna asked. "I am starting now, at once."

The girl stared, and looked foolish.

"Send your mistress to me. I will make it right with her," said Bruna, impulsively. "I like your look. I will be kind to you. Change will help you to forget your troubles."

Still the girl only blushed and looked foolish.

"Well?" from Bruna, impatiently.

"Miss—ma'am, I'm sure you meant it most kind, but—I'm a poor girl, and I'm in trouble, but—I've always been a good girl, and kept myself honest and respectable."

"So I thought, from your face, or I should not have spoken to you as I did. Will you go or not? There is no time to lose. Don't be afraid to tell me what you wish."

Blushing more deeply than ever, the girl stammered out—

"It's the gentleman, ma'am; they're say-

ing downstairs that he's not your husbai
nor your brother—that you've run aw
with him, ma'am. Being but a poor g
my character's all I've got to look to, y
see, ma'am; and if I'd once lived with—
Thanking you all the same, miss, ma'a
and no offence meant, as I'm sure you
tended most kind."

For a moment Bruna stood stunned a
speechless; the flush on the girl's face :
flected hotly on her own, and her bro
knitting themselves threateningly. Tl
was indeed having the realization of con
quences roughly forced upon her. Comm
people to talk of her with disrespect!
common people to think of her as son
thing that could not be named! This sm
incident almost broke Bruna down. As s
stood looking at the girl, and wonder ga
way to comprehension, a vision of her i
ture, horribly repulsive, presented itself
her. No friends, no position, no prot
tion, no atmosphere—in brief, no Perc

To have to breathe the breath of the vulgar world—to be jostled, shoulder to shoulder, hap-hazard, with anyone with whom accident might bring her into contact!

The girl stammered excuses, explanations, apologies, till at last, awed by the fixed stare with which Bruna, wrapped round by a vision of things to be, regarded her, she burst into violent weeping. At that Bruna roused herself; she passed her hands across her forehead and said,

"What you have heard downstairs is all wrong, my good girl. The gentleman who is here with me is here merely to see me safe on board. I go alone. I am not angry with you, but I will not take you with me. I shall find it easy to get a servant among the poor passengers, and I think it is better that you should stay here, where you are known and respected. Here is a present for you. Your sorrows will pass, probably, sooner than you now think

possible. This will buy your wedding-dress."

When the girl had left the room, Bruna sat still in it, and thought, as she had not thought before, though she believed she had thought out everything, reälised everything. The way this practical touch had shaken and moved her showed her this was not so.

When she rose to complete her last arrangements, her resolution was not shaken, but her heart was indeed heavy. Mr. Malcolm noticed some change in her when she came downstairs, having heard him return—less hardness and more misery, it seemed to him—something that emboldened him once more to urge that she would reconsider, retract, repent.

"The time is past, even more utterly and irrevocably than I had imagined. I have had a lesson," was her answer. "When you offer me a home with your sister, you wrong your sister," she added.

"Who has dared——" he began; but she stopped him, and would explain nothing.

"Do we walk? Is it near? We can start now?"

"I have a cab at the door."

"I am sorry, Mr. Malcolm, that you should be of further service to me. I have already trespassed too much upon your toleration."

"I think *you* owe *me* this much of toleration, Miss D'Almeida."

"Poor Mr. Malcolm," she said, with a laugh that grated upon him harshly, and made him, more than anything else could have done, understand the utter futility of further pleading or remonstrance. "You have been cruelly treated, robbed of your friend, and for a time, at least, of your self-respect. You have paid the price, and, at the last, been cheated of the anticipated reward! Poor Mr. Malcolm! By comparison I surely fare well. Even at this moment two men are willing to marry me. One a true and stainless gentleman, himself so blameless

that he is ready to hold all men honourable, all women pure; the other—how shall we describe the other?"

"You are heartless and unwomanly in your mockery, Miss D'Almeida. You might see that I am already overwhelmed with bitterness, and might spare me your parting stings!"

She answered nothing then, but when they were in the cab she said,

"Console yourself, Mr. Malcolm. You go to Africa to hunt lions; you will soon forget. As to the evil you have done, good will come of it. Percival, doubtless, will suffer cruelly, for a time, from the double treachery of his friend and his *fiancée*; but Ann will console him—he and sweet Ann will console each other. Out of their true-hearted sorrow will grow a fulness of joy."

"And for you? Possibly it is your fate more than all that troubles me."

"For me? I shall live my life, realize

my ambition—or, at least, I shall use and spend myself in the endeavour to do so."

A few minutes after they were on board. The pier clock struck three.

"Just four and twenty hours since I bade Ann good-bye!"

"And still you have no regrets?"

"No regrets? I have a thousand, and again a thousand, but they are all puerile, trivial."

Mr. Malcolm had spent money he could ill spare in providing comforts and luxuries for Bruna, things she took for granted as the ordinary conditions of a sea-voyage. He stayed with her till the boat was about to start. She seemed self-absorbed, and took very little notice of him. At the last she offered him her hand, and spoke a few words of thanks and of apology. He wrote down in her memorandum-book his sister's address, begging her, if he could ever serve her, to address to him there.

"And if the lions have not eaten you, you will come to me? Even if I am old and ugly, pasted, painted, and made up?"

"Mockery to the very last!"

"No, there shall not be. It is just possible, Mr. Malcolm, it seems to me, that if ever we should meet again, we might be friends. Good-bye. Indeed I feel sorry to have caused you so much pain," she added, as he wrung her hand. "That you would care for me in any way that was not one to deepen my repugnance towards you, I had not thought. Good-bye."

He went on shore.

As long as land remained in sight, she kept her place on deck; afterwards she went below, down into the depths—in more ways than one, down into the depths. There, for many a dreary day and dreadful night she lay prostrate, submerged in misery, physical and mental. "The swooning sickness on the deadly sea" dealt heavily with her, and apart even from that she was ill,

consumed by a wasting kind of low fever. And Mr. Malcolm? Like a man who dreams that he dreams, who tries to wake, but who cannot, he walked back to the inn—to the room in which he had talked with Miss D'Almeida. Looking round it, he saw on the floor a withered rose—the rose she had gathered as she left Beech-holmes, and had worn in the front of her riding-dress. He picked it up and held it in his clenched hand; he threw himself into the chair she had sat in, and remained sunk in a sort of stupor of thought. What he had done, what he had left undone, the world, and all the men and women in it, especially himself and Bruna (for now she was gone it seemed to him more like hate than love with which he thought of her), all things seemed to him alike detestable.

"At this rate I shall go mad!" was the exclamation with which he sprang up.

He furiously rang the bell, and demanded to know what was owing.

"The lady has settled everything," was a mild waiter's answer.

The mild waiter was considerably appalled by the oath sworn by Mr. Malcolm; but he could not think evil of a gentleman who followed that oath by saying,

"I choose to pay over again, then. You will be none the poorer."

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW THEY BORE IT AT BEECH-HOLMES.

ANN and Percy wandered from window to window of the great drawing-room, straining their eyes, trying to see through the stormy dusk the two returning riders. At first no great astonishment had mingled with their anxiety. Of course Mr. Malcolm would insist upon Bruna's taking shelter from that tremendous storm. Percy, who had returned to town about an hour after Bruna had started, had immediately sent a carriage after her, along the road the gate-keeper's wife had reported her to have taken, that, if she chose, she might be driven home.

The dusk deepened to dark, and wonder and alarm began to creep coldly over Ann; wonder, alarm, and a sickening suspicion, which reason repelled, and of which her heart was ashamed. At dinner-time, when at least a couple of hours had elapsed since their return might have been reasonably expected, old Mr. Travers entered the drawing-room with an almost jovial cheerfulness of manner.

"Come, Ann, my girl," he said, "we two will dine sensibly and comfortably. Percival will please himself. As to those others, from what I have observed, I think it much more likely I shall join them than that we shall ever see them back here."

"What do you mean, sir?" from Percy.

"What I mean, sir, is that they're gone to the devil together—that they've eloped, sir—eloped!"

"It is fortunate I can remember that you are my father," answered Percy, turning from him.

"Come, Ann, come. The soup must be getting cold. To-day, for a wonder, I feel an appetite for my dinner. Come, Ann, come," and he took her hand, attempting to place it on his arm.

"One moment, sir," Ann pleaded, holding back—"I will follow you in one moment; but, first, I want to speak to Percy."

"Go with my father, Ann, and try and keep him from talking," was Percy's request, when Ann, her hand upon his arm, looked up pitifully into his face, which, it struck her, was changed and stern.

"In one little moment, Percy, only tell me what it is you fear."

"Surely we both have the same fear," said Percy.

The blood rushed over Ann's face as she persisted in questioning.

"And what is that?"

"What should that be, Ann, what could that be, except that some serious accident has happened to Bruna?"

Ann's eyes fell from Percy's face. Percy added,

"Malcolm should have sent the groom back at once, to tell us exactly what has happened. He might know we should fear the worst."

"They had no groom with them," said Ann.

At that a flush mounted to Percy's forehead, but he immediately recovered from the emotion that had driven it there, and said,

"Of course not. James was with me. I might have known that Bruna would not let old John go with them in such rough weather."

Taking Ann's hand from his arm, he added,

"I am going out directly—to ride along the road, and find out what has happened, and where. Any orders I send back, I will send to you, Ann, and I know that you yourself will see them executed. Meanwhile, dear Ann, the only thing you can do

is to go to my father and try to keep him from blaspheming, as he did just now. You will see, too, that Bruna's room is warm and ready when I bring her back."

Ann could hardly keep herself from crying out—"Oh! Percy, she will never come back, never!" Yet she was not conscious of thinking this. Instead, she only bowed her head, and answered, "Yes, Percy."

As Ann went into the dining-room, Percy left the house. Poor Ann!—there followed for her some bad hours!

Old Mr. Travers was in a wonderful flow of spirits—he hardly found fault with anything served at table, and even almost praised one or two dishes. Ann sat pale and silent, not able to eat or to smile—sick at heart with a deadly sickness. When the servants had left the room, the old man came round to where Ann sat. Pouring her out a great glass of wine, he bade her drink it, to put a little colour into her cheeks.

"Keep up your spirits, my girl," he said. "One woman's loss may prove another woman's gain."

That was almost more than Ann could bear, but, for Percy's sake, Ann sat on with the old man till he was taken off to bed. Then, alone in the great drawing-room, she kept watch, hour after hour, for Percy's return. Once her solitude was broken by her maid. The girl came to tell her that the carriage had come back empty. Having told that, the girl hovered about her mistress, longing to be questioned. She was not questioned, but dismissed.

"That will do, Wood; you can go to bed. I shall not want you to-night. Tell the others to go to bed—all but Hughes."

Ann's face was unusually severe, her tone unusually reserved. The girl went away, saying to herself, "She knows it already."

About two o'clock in the morning, Percy, admitted by Hughes, the old butler, made his way to the drawing-room, where he was

told Miss Travers still was. He was splashed from head to foot, and wet to the skin. Ann stood up when he came towards her, but she shook too much to be able to speak.

He did not look at her; he came straight up to the fire, and held his hands over it; his face, white and stern and still, looked more like a marble than a mortal face. When he spoke, his voice startled her—it was so changed, so hoarse and strange.

"It seems that the worst we could have imagined is true. There seems no room left for doubt. I followed them as far as Hilston; they had had luggage sent to wait for them there. It seems as if there were no room left for doubt." So far he spoke like a man in a dream; then, as if suddenly roused, cried passionately—"But, Ann, I can't believe it. Ann, tell me it is not true!"

He turned on Ann with the eagerness of hope. Ann tried to speak, but her voice failed her; her face, however, showed him

that from her he could expect no consolation. He returned to his contemplation of the fire, appearing engrossed by the endeavour to warm his hands. There was a silence that seemed to Ann to be no part of time, to belong to eternity; and then Percy spoke again, in a heart-broken voice—

"How was it, Ann, she could not trust me? What need was there for treachery and flight? A word would have been enough. Is it not strange, Ann, that neither of them could trust me?"

Now there burst from Ann the cry,

"But, Percy, it is not possible—not possible!"

"That is how I feel about it," he answered eagerly.

Even while she cried, "It is not possible," however, conviction had mastered Ann. All that evening she had been recalling strange looks and stranger words, Bruna's tenderly close kisses of farewell, Bruna's

look of passionate love as she rode away.

"She will have left some letter, some written message. I must go and see," said Ann.

She went upstairs to Bruna's rooms. Earlier in the evening, while she was still, minute by minute, expecting Bruna's wet and weary return, Ann had many times been there, to see that all was warm and bright, to pull Bruna's favourite chair near the fire, to put her quilted slippers in front of it, to re-arrange the dainty little tea-service, to open and display the new books brought by Percy. It was in this way that Ann was in the habit of petting and waiting upon Bruna. It was sometimes said, among the servants of the house, that it was no wonder Miss D'Almeida did not choose to have a regular maid of her own, as Miss Travers did for her almost all the services of one.

Now Ann found the fires burnt out, the candles flaring in their sockets. In the ser-

vants' hall there had not been from the beginning any expectation that Miss D'Almeida would return. True things were known there of which Ann and Percy had no suspicion, and false things were believed there which they would never have credited.

Ann now searched for some sign; she opened a wardrobe in the bedroom, where Bruna kept her plainer and more ordinary dresses. It was empty. She opened a writing-table in the sitting-room, and found that also empty, except of one letter addressed to herself.

"I might have known when she kissed me," moaned Ann; "and if I had known some way I would have kept her, if she'd killed me!"

Then Ann sank into the chair set ready for Bruna, and read Bruna's letter.

"Tell Percy I am flying with his friend (who is good enough to mean to marry me), and that we are both of us lost to him for ever—as utterly lost as if we were

both dead. We act on no passionate impulse, but have deliberately planned this treachery."

Here followed a blank page, and then, on the next, was written,

"Ann, my heart is bursting with things I must not say. I must set a great stone of silence upon it! I am walled in! Like a false wife, or a shamed nun of the Middle Ages, walled in alive! If we ever, in any other world, meet again, shall we understand each other? But what one world could hold us four? You and Percy (on whom may heaven's best blessings rest for ever!), and we other two—traitors! Be happy, you two good ones, and make haste to forget Bruna."

"Percy, oh! Percy, my darling! my darling! how are you to bear it?"

So moaned Ann; and there followed a bitter feeling to endure, that in some way she could have helped it—that in some way it was her fault. At that moment came

Percy's step along the passage, and Percy's hand was laid upon the door.

"Are you here, Ann?"

"Yes, Percy."

"What have you found? Why do you not come back to me?"

He came in, up to where she sat, saw the letter, and took it from her passive hand. He read it.

"I might have known, when she kissed me so," moaned Ann again.

"She kissed you so?" echoed Percy. "And for me she had no word!"

He leaned his elbow on the marble of Bruna's mantelpiece, and looked into the ashes of Bruna's fire.

"It is worse than her death would have been!" he said grimly, by-and-by, from between set teeth.

Presently he re-read her letter. "There is something more in this than we know or can understand."

He turned to Ann. Ann knew that he

waited to hear her speak gentle, excusing words of Bruna. She could find no such words to say. Percy's suffering made her heart hard for Bruna.

Ann's silence seemed to Percy to press the cold blackness of things down closer. For a long time neither of them spoke. Ann moved once, to light a candle, or they would have been left in the dark. By-and-by she said, timidly,

"Percy, you must be wet to the skin—chilled to the bone."

"What of that! What must she be, my poor Bruna? And he won't know how to take care of her."

At this he hid his face and sobbed; and Ann, slipping to the rug at his feet, sobbed too, and felt as if it would have been a blessed thing to know she could sob her life away. After a little she found it possible to say,

"You must not let yourself be ill, Percy. You don't know how soon she may want you."

"She want me!" he echoed; and passion too fierce for tears checked his at their source, as he cried, "It is their treachery that stings me worst!" He added, "On her part it must have been madness. I could swear she did not love him."

His gentle heart presently reproached him for his want of tenderness to Ann, his fellow-sufferer. He lifted her from where she crouched, looking up at him, and asked,

"What is it, Ann, you are wanting me to do? You are pleading for something."

She prayed him that he would take some care of himself—would go to his room, and let old Hughes help him off with his soaked clothing.

"First leave me alone here a little."

Ann left him, feeling as she might have done had she left him alone to his agony of watching by Bruna's corpse. She went no further than the door; outside it she crouched down, leant her back against the wall, buried her face in her hands, and waited

there in the cold and the darkness. She heard Percy's step cross to the inner room. In the morning she found the marks made by his head and his arms, as he had knelt by Bruna's bed. What a miserable night! What a miserable night that was for both of them—for all three of them! Of the three it was most probably Ann who suffered the most; for the misery of misery is to be conscious of the agony of our beloved, and powerless in any way to help it.

When Percy at last came out of the room, he passed Ann by without seeing her. When he opened his own door at the far end and opposite side of the corridor, Ann received a gleam of comfort from seeing that the place was warmly aglow with firelight. She knew, of course, with her reason, that from warmth and light Percy could gain no comfort; but it is not possible to feel for our beloved the same indifference as we feel for ourselves to the more or less of physical that is added to mental misery.

As Ann crept to her room, and threw herself, dressed, upon her bed—the first time in all Ann's well-regulated and controlled life that she had done such a thing—she was conscious only of one longing—that to Percy she were mother, sister, or brother, so that she might have watched out that night with him—might that night have had his head on her shoulder, and her arms round him. How she lay in wait for him through the next few heavy days! Going constantly up and down the stairs, and to and fro the halls and passages, for the chance of a meeting with him for a moment, as if by accident, to try and judge from his face how he bore it, to try and assure herself that he was not ill.

It was repugnance to the notion of meeting his father that kept Percy closely engaged in "business" in his own rooms during the short time that elapsed before he left Beech-holmes. For he did leave Beech-holmes.

Events did not follow the course Bruna had planned for them. Percy did not take his sorrows to Ann, to be softened by her consolations—he took them away, to bear them alone. Having lost his lady, of whom most truly he could have said, "I had rather she had been worthy of love than she had loved me," having been betrayed by his own familiar friend, in whom he had trusted, Percy burned with great bitterness, his sweet blood seemed turned to gall, he longed to ride a-tilt against all the world. Beech-holmes and his father were, of all things, intolerable to him.

Sweet Ann, understanding something of this, was glad he should go, though it left her most lonely. Parting from Ann, Percy said,

"How I wish, Ann, you were indeed my sister, that I might keep you always with me."

The words were spoken for Ann's sake, and Ann knew this. She knew that Percy,

[illegible]

[illegible] She was one of those happy [illegible] her days were [illegible] of good works; she had her [illegible] delights and consolations in the homes to which she brought delight and consolation. Yet even Ann at times felt sad enough and desolate. Even Ann's heart would sometimes shiver and shake to feel itself so

alone and so utterly lonely. Ann had no friend of her own age and rank. Bruna's love for her had always been too jealous to admit a rival.

CHAPTER XVII.

ANN'S HAPPINESS.

FIVE or six years after Bruna's flight, o
Mr. Travers died. Ann might ha
been appalled, had she known beforehan
that five or six years of her young life we
to be spent as these years were spent; b
they passed not unhappily, nor did th
seem long. If the Winters were dreary, th
were always followed by Spring; and
Percy's absences were long, and his visits
Beech-holmes short, he wrote to her mu
and fully.

A few days after the funeral, Ann a
Percy, by the evening fireside, discuss

Ann's future. For once there was between them a strong difference of opinion. Percy wished that Ann should remain at Beech-holmes till she married; he, himself, till that time, living as he had lived. But Ann's views were different, and she was at once so firm and so fond in urging them that Percy had to yield.

It was Ann's dearest wish that Beech-holmes should now have its own master living among his own people. Percy's surrender was not gracious.

"I think you very unreasonable, Ann," he said. "Why should there, for so short a time, be all this arranging and settling and change? You are sure to marry. Why not let things go on as they are for just the short time longer, till you marry?"

"But I don't think I shall marry, Percy. I look forward to having my independent old maid's establishment at Beech-lawns. It has all happened so conveniently with regard to Beech-lawns, you know; the

lease on which it was let having just ru out, and the Fawcetts not wishing to renew it. This seems as if it had happened on purpose for me to be able to go there. I should like to be settled in there, and to have you settled in here by the Spring, Percy. We shall be near neighbours, Percy. Oh it will be so much happier for me than living on here, and knowing that you are stil a wanderer."

"So we are to be neighbours, Ann, and nothing more."

"Nearest neighbours and dearest friends Percy."

Then followed a long talk about the practical details of necessary arrangements. It was agreed that they would go together tomorrow to Beech-lawns, to see what repair and alterations Ann would like to have effected. Then Percy said, meditatively,

"And you don't think you shall marry Ann?"

"No, Percy, I don't think I shall marry.

It had now and again occurred to Percy to suspect that Malcolm had sufficiently impressed Ann to give her, amid the general shock of grief and loss that followed upon Bruna's flight, her own peculiar sorrow. He could even at times suspect Malcolm of having been so doubly a traitor as to have assumed towards Ann some warmth of expression, to conceal from her his passion for Bruna. Had this indeed been so? he now wondered. And had gentle Ann been, thereby, "the more deceived?"

This question in his heart, as he looked at Ann, gave to his eyes some unusual expression, meeting which Ann blushed. At that Percy raised her hands to his lips, and so, for that time, the matter ended.—Well! it all happened according to Ann's planning.

When the Spring was fairly and fully come, Ann was settled in her new home, and Percy was at Beech-holmes. The two houses were barely three miles apart. Those three miles seemed to unite rather than to

separate these "nearest neighbours and dearest friends."

The months of this Spring and Summer were the happiest months of Ann's life. She was more to Percy than she had ever been before. That Summer especially stood apart ever after in Ann's memory as her "happy" Summer. Having said that Ann was happy, it is needless to say that Percy, too, seemed happy.

How quickly the months flew! How soon it seemed that a light brown cloud settled upon the beeches! This surely could not mean Autumn! The drought of this fine Summer had made the trees change their tints unusually early.

But happy as the Summer had been, September had in store for Ann a more exquisite happiness. It was difficult for Ann to believe that ever for anyone before had this world seemed so steeped in love and light as it was for her this September.

The evening of the very last day of Au-

gust was somewhat gloomy and threatening. A breath of winter seemed already breathing about, and rustling the trees with a sound of foreboding; they waved their hands, too, with that significant gesture peculiar to beeches. Percy was at Beech-lawns, but the favourite garden-seat was deserted for the fire-side in Ann's beautiful drawing-room. Percy had not seemed quite himself to-day.

"By-the-by," he presently asked, with assumed carelessness—the question had been a hundred times on the tip of his tongue, as he sat by Ann, before he asked it—"Lady Trefew was here to-day, you said—did her son come with her?"

Ann looked up from her work and answered, "No;" and then, because she was particularly desirous not to do so, Ann blushed crimson.

"You will have him here to-morrow, then, Ann."—A pause; then, "Ann, he has asked me for my 'good word' with you."

"Did you promise him your good word?" Ann asked. This time she did not lift her eyes.

"In a fashion. I now give it to him. Ann, I think Sir Everard Trefew a fine, manlyfellow—simple, honest, sincere, almost worthy of Ann."

"Your good word comes rather late, Percy."

"Has Sir Everard, then, spoken to you?—asked you to be his wife?"

"Yes."

"You answered him—how?"

"That I liked him, esteemed him, but could not marry him."

"That is not an answer to settle any man so much in earnest so I'm sure he was."

"He understood me, Percy; he will not come again. His mother told me as much to-day."

For a good while Percy said nothing; then he suddenly broke out—

"I'm a selfish enough brute to be glad, Ann, wishing to keep you all my own. How I should miss you, Ann! and how I should hate the fellow that won you!"

"Why, Percy, you used to say that, when I married, my husband should be your very dear brother."

It is open to question whether this speech of Ann's was in harmony with the perfect simplicity of her usual character and conduct; from the gladness in her eyes at hearing Percy speak of how he would hate the man who should be her husband, one might have dared decide that it was not.

"I'm changed since then, Ann—grown savage," was Percy's answer.

Presently he laughed.

Ann looked up with a face of startled but pleased inquiry. Of late years Percy's laughter had been a rare sound.

"I was thinking, Ann, of good Mrs. Lane's complaints of the 'inconvenience' of having 'Miss Ann,' as she always will call you, so

far away; of her dismal forebodings as to the 'awkwardness' through the Winter of having you out of reach. To hear her talk, you'd fancy that instead of being the clever, managing woman she is, she was the veriest inexperienced girl. Everything at Beech-holmes is evidently to go to ruin when she has not, and I have not, the opportunity of daily consulting with you, Ann. And then lately she has broadly hinted to me that she thinks me a fool to submit to the farce of two households being kept up, when one would do; when Beech-holmes, as she says, might have its own mistress again, and yet not lose its master."

Ann did not laugh; she bent her head lower over her work, and said nothing.

"I don't know that there was much mirth in my laughter, Ann," Percy continued. "I was thinking of the difference between things as they are and as they appear to other people."

Ann did not ask him what he meant.

Leaning forward towards her, taking up and playing with her scissors, he presently went on, speaking very softly,

"I have been slowly learning lately, Ann, many things have combined to teach me, that, could I believe your heart free to love me, my heart would soon be, if it is not already, wholly yours. But, Ann, I must, I suppose, conclude that between you and me, as between you and others who have sought your love, there is a something which you cannot surmount."

A pause. Then he went on, his tone a rather bitter one—

"I must accept your silence as meaning that I am right in this conclusion—that it pains you to think of my loving you otherwise than as 'sweet sister Ann!'"

Ann could not see her work; the dusk seemed to have come down between it and her so suddenly; but she still bent over it. No, it was not the dusk that had come down,

but a blinding mist of light, of rosy dawn light.

Percy for a few minutes watched her, listening for anything she might softly say. She did not move, she did not speak. Percy rose.

"It is time I went home, Ann," he said. Unknown to himself, he said it drearily. "Ann, dear Ann, my darling! forget what I have said! I fear I have deeply pained you."

Ann dropped her work and stood up. He stood quite near, waiting to say "Good night." Ann moved a little nearer yet, till she could drop her face into his breast. She did this with a little cry which he could not misunderstand. In a moment his arm was round her, holding her folded to him, closer and closer, as she made no movement to withdraw herself.

"This means?" he questioned.

"Oh! Percy, it seems so strange you should not know—that I love you, that I

have always loved you—you, and only you!"

"Is this, can this be true?"

"It is only you who have not known it," she whispered. "Bruna knew it. Before I knew it myself Bruna knew it. It was Bruna who told me it was so. Bruna knew it, your father knew it, even the servants, I sometimes fancied, knew it; only you, Percy, did not know it!"

"God help me to make you happy, Ann, happy as you now make me!"

"I am already too happy," she said. "He has given me my heart's desire."

To this evening followed a few weeks of which Ann thought afterwards,

"Nothing can ever take the memory of them from me. And, while I keep the memory of them, I must know that I have tasted the best happiness of this world."

It was arranged between Ann and Percy that they should be married before Christmas, and should pass the Winter together at Beech-holmes. In November

Percy went up to town for a couple of days, on business connected with his marriage. The latter of these two days was a day of marvellous beauty—just an ideal September day, dropped into the midst of November. Ann felt, for her, restless on this day, and could not sit still in the house. She walked, and walked further than she knew, so lost was she in happy thought, and found herself by-and-by in one of the turf-rides leading to Beech-holmes House, and not so very far from the house itself. She stopped to listen at leisure to the mellow singing of a robin. "It is difficult," she thought, "but for the brown carpet under the beeches, and the rustle of dry leaves under foot, to believe it is not Spring-time. It is grievous that Percy should be among streets and shops on such a day. Some of the Spring joy-feeling is, doubtless, in my own heart and eyes. This is indeed my Spring! But surely to any heart, to any eyes, the day is marvellously fair. If only

Percy were with me!" And then Ann began to gently wonder if ever there were any joy in this world so perfect as to have no "if only." To them both she knew (they had talked and thought much of Bruna since their engagement) there would always, in the happiness of their happy loves, be an "if only," unless there should some day come to them happy and good news of Bruna. "In the happiness of their happy lives!" Ann, picturing to herself what that happiness would be, looked about her with happy tears in happy eyes, and, involuntarily folding her hands, said in her heart, "What have I done that I should be so beyond others happy, happy, happy, so satisfied with my heart's desire? It is nothing that I have done." She immediately added, "It is the goodness, the unspeakable goodness of God."

It was late, the evening sun was very low, when Ann turned towards home.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHAT CAME AFTER.

ANN had not walked far towards home, when she became aware that she was followed. Footsteps were noiseless on the turf, but a shadow pursued her shadow. Ann stopped and turned. There was the possibility it might be Percy. It was not Percy, but a gentleman who, lifting his hat when she turned, showed a head on which the last light of the low sun shone ruddier than even on the ruddy beech-leaves. Bowing profoundly, he stood silent, hat in hand, as if waiting to be recognised. Ann's rapid change of colour showed him he was recog-

nised before his name, a startled exclamation, passed her lips.

For a few seconds they looked at each other, and no more was said. Then Ann's eyes noticed that Mr. Malcolm's hat was covered with crape. At that the word "Brúna?" at once a cry and a question, escaped her.

"My mourning is for my sister Helen. She was married last Autumn, and died this Summer—in India." After the very briefest pause, he added, "Of Miss D'Almeida I know nothing."

At first Ann, never very quick, hardly recognised all those words meant. When she did, she could only echo, almost stupidly,

"Of Miss D'Almeida you know nothing!"

"Had you not better sit down for a few moments?" Mr. Malcolm asked, seeing that there was a felled beech-trunk close beside them, and fearing, from the deadly whiteness of Ann's face, that she might faint and fall.

Ann only shook her head. She asked, as soon as she could again speak,

"But Bruna is your wife, Mr. Malcolm?"

"Miss D'Almeida did me no such honour," he answered, with a bitter smile; and then, in a few brief sentences, he told Ann how he had been deceived and how discarded by Bruna.

Ann had mechanically resumed her walk towards home. He kept at her side. When he began to give her more details of what had passed between Bruna and himself, Ann, who, although she did not yet know it, had been partially stunned by the sudden shock of what she had heard, could only by the greatest effort attend to him. It seemed more natural to watch the squirrels among the branches, and among the fallen beech-mast. And as she had a sort of feeling as if Mr. Malcolm, and the things he was saying to her, only formed part of a dream from which she should presently wake, it did not seem worth while to make

any great effort to understand. Mr. Malcolm ended by saying,

"From your shocked surprise in learning what I've told you I conclude that you are in equal ignorance with myself of Miss D'Almeida's fate during the seven years that have passed since she sailed."

"Seven years!" murmured Ann, "is it seven years?"

"Almost exactly seven years," he answered; adding, "My own impression is that she is dead—that she died upon the voyage. Of course she left her own name behind her, what name she assumed I do not know. It is more than probable she died upon the voyage—she looked mortally ill when I parted from her."

"And you could let her go, ill, alone!" cried Ann, in heart-wrung reproach. "And you knew how tenderly we loved her! How we would have cared for and comforted her!"

"I assure you, Miss Travers, that in this

I am not open to reproach. I was utterly powerless. All through I was nothing but Miss D'Almeida's tool; when she had done with me she threw me away. I was something of a sufferer, you may believe," he added, bitterly.

To that Ann answered him nothing. Silently they walked on, side by side, Ann, after a time, hardly conscious of his presence. Ann was beginning to understand it; in some measure to understand the motives from which Bruna had acted. Only, of course, Ann glorified Bruna, magnifying the good, diminishing or ignoring the evil of those motives—she would not have been Ann had she not done this.

Ann did not, for a moment, accept Mr. Malcolm's hypothesis that Bruna was dead; she had a sort of feeling that this was not possible. It was like Ann that her heart filled full of Bruna—wonder at her, horror for her, delight in her, above all, longing after her—to the entire exclusion of any

thought about herself, about how her "happiness," her future, might, by all this, be affected. So absorbed was Ann that, by-and-by, she would have passed in at her own gate without any notice of her companion, but he resented and resisted this, saying, in a harsh voice that startled her,

"You will not give me your hand, I suppose. You gentle-hearted, good women are always among the most unforgiving. I can assure you, however, Miss Travers, that I have certainly not gone without my punishment, that I have some claim upon your pity. Seven years have not obliterated the memory of the bitterness of my humiliation."

Ann, for the first time, regarded him; before she had only recognised him. She could see that he looked like a man who, at all events, had known physical suffering and hardship. He looked, somehow, poor, too, forlornly neglected. There was about him a something that suggested him to be

one for whom no woman cared, and who cared little or nothing for himself. Ann offered him her hand, with something of pity shining in her eyes.

"I hope I am not unforgiving, Mr. Malcolm," she said; adding, "Where are you going now, Mr. Malcolm? Percy, I should think, will wish to see you." She said that doubtfully.

"I am going to town, but I will give you my address."

"Will you come in and write it?" She led the way to her charming drawing-room.

"This is your home, then, now, Miss Travers?" he said, looking round; he was reminded by her blush to add—"But only, as I learnt at the house, to be so for a few weeks longer. Will you allow such a fellow as you think me to offer you my most sincere congratulations?"

Ann murmured some gentle words, and busied herself in finding pen and ink and paper to lay before him. As he was leav-

ing, she pressed upon him an offer of refreshment; he looked so gaunt, it forced itself upon her that he might, even, be hungry. He declined her invitation and swung away.

Ann's first thought was to write and to despatch a note to Percy—to await his return at Beech-holmes.

"Come to me as soon as you can," she wrote—"I have something most wonderful to tell you—something, in some ways, sad beyond thought, and yet that, the more I think of it, seems the more full of a most noble kind of joy and of hope."

"Of hope." Hope of what?

Ann sent off her note, and went to her room to remove her out-door dress, and make her simple evening toilette. That question, hope of what? kept hovering on the threshold of thought. Ann was tired. She seated herself, by-and-by, in her favourite low chair by the drawing-room fire, to rest and to think. It was now that she was

visited by a consciousness of herself as herself in this matter. Hope of what? Of finding Bruna?—of bringing Bruna home? "We will not rest till we find her and bring her home, the poor, brave, noble darling!" So Ann said to herself; and then there began to dawn upon Ann the meaning of what might be implied in finding Bruna, and bringing Bruna home.

Ann had not a quick imagination, but she had a most sensitive conscience. Bruna had been quite right when she said, "Ann is not at all clever, but she is ever so wise." Ann's "wisdom," however, was of that kind which is but another name for "goodness:" the result of singleness of heart and simplicity of sincere desire to do right. Ann now repeated, "No, we will not rest till we find Bruna and bring her home," and then thought seemed arrested.

Presently she lifted up her pale, fair face, and raised and clasped her hands, as if in appeal. She whispered, a moment after, in

an awe-struck voice, "Is it this I have to do—and now?—now, when, at last, he seems so happy in loving me?—now, when I am so endlessly happy?" She added, by-and-by, "Thy will be done."

Ann, after this, soon seemed again quite quiet-hearted; but she was now fully roused to the possibility of what she might be called upon to do, or rather to suffer and to resign. Sooner than she had expected him, Percy came.

"Nothing the matter with my darling?" was his first eager question.

"Nothing the matter with me, Percy." She answered him with a loving smile, but not without an inward pang at the heart, as she thought how soon perhaps that title might cease to be exclusively, or at all, her own.

"Ann, what have you been doing to yourself?" was Percy's next question. "Sweet and fair as you always are," he

went on to say, "I have never seen you look so altogether lovely."

He held her at arm's length, gazing at her in admiring wonder. Agitation had made Ann's face more mobile and emotional—had given it the look the Germans express by the word *verklärt*, and which our word "clarified" hardly seems to render; and in doing this had done for it what sometimes seemed to want doing. It chanced, too, that even Ann's dress this evening was one of those fortunate accidents of delicate harmony which do a good deal to enhance her unpronounced sort of graceful pleasingness.

For answer, and perhaps also lest she should betray herself by too much emotion, Ann held up her face for his kiss. Hers which answered it was more warm and eager than was usual to Ann's gentle and undemonstrative nature. In her heart Ann was feeling as if to-night's kisses might be kisses of farewell.

"And now, Ann, for this wonderful news," said Percy, as he seated himself, and drew Ann down close beside him.

"You have seen nobody, heard nothing that might lead you to guess what, whom it is about?"

"No, dearest. My man told me a gentleman, who would not leave his name, but said he would call again, or write, had been to see me."

"I have seen him, Percy. Percy, that was Mr. Malcolm."

"Ann!"

"Yes, Percy, that was Mr. Malcolm. He overtook me as he was leaving Beechholmes. It was from him I heard what I want to tell you."

"From Malcolm! He dared come here! He presumed to speak to you, Ann? And Bruna? What of Bruna? Tell me quickly, Ann, what of Bruna?"

Ann saw that he was greatly agitated; she hastened to tell him all she knew.

Percy's hands, quite involuntarily, went up to hide his face as he listened. When Ann ended, his only remark was, "It seems to me wonderful we had not known this of ourselves before."

When Ann had a good while ended he got up, and went to a distant window, and stood there a long time looking out. Perhaps he wanted, out of Ann's sight, to conquer the first rush of complicated emotions. Horror was, probably, at first, the thing uppermost in Percy's mind—horror of the black void into which, as it seemed to him, Bruna had plunged and disappeared. But there was also an immense and passionate out-gushing of tenderness, of love so long sealed up as to have been forgotten.

In Ann's mind joy was slowly increasing, and Bruna was becoming glorified more and more.

"Percy," Ann presently pleaded, "don't keep away from me out there. Let us feel together about it. We do feel together

about it. We do feel, first, that we must find Bruna—we must have her home. We both feel we cannot rest till we have Bruna safe home."

Percy came up to Ann; but he paused behind her. His hand laid caressingly on her shoulder, he said,

"You are so far right, darling, that we must search for Bruna, if possible find her, to befriend her, if, as seems inevitable, she needs friends. As to bringing her home—in all human probability that will be impossible."

"You mean that she is dead?"

"No, Ann, I mean worse than that," he answered, sternly and harshly.

Ann pondered a few instants as to what his meaning might be, then she said,

"No, Percy, you must not mean worse than that. The thought is unworthy of you, and wrongs Bruna. Worse than death can't be true of our Bruna!"

Percy touched Ann's hair with his lips, still standing behind her.

"We will hasten on our marriage, Ann, that we may go together to find Bruna," were his next words.

At this Percy was conscious that a slight shiver ran through Ann's frame.

"As my wife, Ann, your good name can suffer no tarnish, even if what you will not believe possible is true of Bruna."

"Percy," Ann said, with unusual energy, "I am sure that if we find Bruna we shall find her as good, as pure, as—" Here Ann's sudden energy left her, and she added, soft, sweet, and low, "As your wife should be."

"Ann, you, thank Heaven, know nothing of the world into which Bruna plunged, alone, inexperienced, with her glorious beauty. Good God! it is maddening to think of! By nothing short of a miracle could she escape destruction!"

He resumed his walk to and fro; but after awhile came to Ann again, and this time he stood in front of her.

"My darling, in four weeks you were to have married me. How many weeks sooner may it be, Ann?"

Ann made one or two attempts to speak before she succeeded; then she said,

"Percy, I want something different from what you want. I wish that we should wait till we have found Bruna. The very first thing in our hearts should be Bruna—to find Bruna—Bruna, who sacrificed herself for us."

Percy urgently pleaded for his way, that they should be married at once, and start together to find Bruna; but Ann was unflinching, gentle as always, but absolutely determined, though unable to give any reason for her obstinacy. Perhaps in their hearts both Ann and Percy understood the reason of this obstinacy; but if so, it was, at all events on Percy's part, with a secret and unacknowledged understanding—as yet.

Percy dined with Ann that evening, and stayed late with her. Bruna was the in-

exhaustible subject of their talk. Reminiscences of Bruna, speculations about Bruna, little bits of evidence as to when she had first contemplated the step she had taken, and why she had contemplated it, and wonder at their own blindness, that had not seen and understood anything of what now all seemed so clear and plain.

To Ann there was in this evening, underlying everything, an unrecognized pathos of farewell. Not that she had any idea of not seeing Percy again, but that she had a dim feeling that things would not ever again be between them as they had lately been; they two all to each other—too close to leave room for anything between. Her unrecognized expectation was that former things would come back again—that for Percy she would soon be again only "sweet sister Ann," while for Bruna all his lover's worship of love would revive. And Ann, even without knowing it, was ready, when the time should come, to pronounce this right;

to pronounce that it was Bruna who was the one worthy to be Percy's wife. Bruna who, according to Ann, had splendidly sacrificed herself for him; while she, Ann, what had she ever done for him? Just loved him always, because she could not help it! What possible merit could there be in that?

Percy saw Mr. Malcolm in London. An interview which was bitterly painful to them both, and from which Percy gained little fresh knowledge; but together they set going a system of inquiry which it hardly seemed could prove fruitless of information, whether Bruna were dead or not. If dead, they would surely obtain knowledge of the date and circumstances of her death.

A few days after Percy came to Ann with a large bundle of newspapers—American, German, French, and Italian. Half a glance showed Ann that he was greatly agitated.

"I got these through Malcolm this morning," he began, at once. "See here, Ann,

and here, and here," hastily unfolding paper after paper, pointing with trembling fingers to passage after passage. "There can be no doubt, Ann—can there, or hardly any? This is, must be, Bruna!"

Ann's little hands went up to her temples.

"Give me time, Percy, please," she pleaded. "You are too quick for me. I haven't time to understand. You know, dear, I'm always rather slow and stupid."

"I'll take a turn in the garden, and come back to you. You'll see, Ann what immense enthusiasm she has created, both by her singing and her acting. First in America,—confound those Yankees for their freedom of expression!—and since on the Continent. There can't be a doubt. I think there can't be a doubt; but I wait to know what you think, dear. She's in Paris, now, Ann—actually in Paris. But I quite confuse you with my excitement, Ann."

He left her for, perhaps, ten minutes,

which seemed to him ten hours. Then he was at her window.

"Well, Ann, what do you think? This Madame Brune is our Bruna."

"I feel no doubt; but you must go and see, Percy. I remember now that I have heard of this Madame Brune before. It seems strange I did not think of Bruna—only, you see, we thought of Bruna always as having married Mr. Malcolm, and——"

"And," interrupted Percy, "Malcolm, and any other man worthy the name of man, would sooner see his wife dead than an actress."

"No, Percy, that can't be so. That must be exaggeration, dear. Very noble women have been actresses."

"It is detestable!" cried Percy, not heeding Ann's words—"it is detestable beyond endurance to read what these fellows write about our Bruna—as if she were public property, as, indeed, an actress is. Oh! Ann, I don't know, but I think I'd rather

have learned that Bruna was dead than this——"

"You won't feel so, Percy, when you've found her, and have found her just our Bruna still."

"I almost doubt the wisdom of seeking her, Ann. She has chosen her path—she is succeeding in it. Let her keep in it."

"No, Percy, that is not how you really feel. You will go and see her; you will find her our Bruna still, our darling—only the woman will be nobler, even, than the girl was; you will bring her home. I long for her, Percy. You don't know what I lost out of my life when I lost Bruna, and how I long to have her back again. When could you start, Percy?—to-morrow?—perhaps to-night? No time should be lost in finding her."

"I could start to-night," Percy said slowly, soberly, trying to control his great emotion—the emotion which had seemed to have made of the man a boy again.

When Ann bade Percy good-bye, drooping her head upon his breast, so that her face was half hidden, she said, in a voice very low, but distinct, unbroken and clear as a bell, with a piercing sort of clearness,

"Percy, I wish to say, if, when you find Bruna, you find a Bruna who loves you, whom you love, who is in no way unworthy to be your wife—and if you find her, I believe you will find her this, and thus—then, Percy, remember I am to be Sister Ann again, for always Sister Ann; and oh! Percy, so happy it should be so, and you and Bruna be happy. You understand me, Percy? You will remember?"

"I will remember," he said, "that one of God's angels lives on earth, and is called Ann Travers."

Only so, and with kisses, and a long close strain against his heart, would he, could he, answer her.

When he had left her he marvelled.

"Is she so far less than a woman, that she is unconscious of a woman's passion of love or of jealousy?—or is she indeed so far more than a woman that she is beyond these things?"

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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